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## **Securitisation processes in the formulation of European foreign and security policy in sub-Saharan Africa<sup>1</sup>**

### **Why an EU foreign and security policy in sub-Saharan Africa? A theoretical puzzle**

The EU foreign and security policy in Africa has undergone sweeping changes, most notably with the launch of its first autonomous military operation ever, the use of development aid to fund military deployments and its first steps into foreign military cooperation and security sector reform. Originally coined the “Battle Groups for Africa”, the latest and up to now most successful development in ESDP has moreover been explicitly vindicated on the necessity to be able to intervene in African conflicts.

The explanation of such groundbreaking changes raises profound theoretical challenges. The large scale and innovative involvement of the EU in Africa can indeed hardly be accounted for within a realist or a liberal approach based on European interests:

- The ACP-EC relationship has been gradually lost its prominence since the end of the Cold War. New development aid priorities then emerged in Central and Eastern Europe while global and bilateral liberalisation agreements further eroded the asymmetric trade preferences that the ACP once benefited from. Africa today represents neither a major economic interest nor a pressing security concern for the EU.
- Some of its member states of course entertain a specific relationship with Africa, but their interests in the region are either colliding or said to be waning. Some defence and foreign ministries are furthermore opposed to any Europeanisation of their African policies. The former colonial powers in Europe can therefore hardly said to constitute a consistent and powerful lobby group.
- Interventions in Africa might prove more dangerous than rewarding in terms of national or European interests. A commitment to contribute to the stabilisation of the region exposes the EU to both a risk of failure and a danger of overstretch in a war-ridden continent. The French involvement in Africa might even raise suspicions and deter other member states from accepting to involve the EU as such.

Stability in sub-Saharan Africa therefore represents neither a priority nor a least common denominator among the member states of the EU. Logics of consequence would seemingly have kept the Europeans out of Africa instead of getting them increasingly involved.

### **The invention of necessity: the social construction of European security issues**

The mere confrontation of national interests can therefore not account for the EU security involvement in Africa. Exploring logics of appropriateness would imply a reference to socialisation processes between representatives of the member states at the European level. These processes need be substantiated theoretically and assessed empirically.

Structural discourse analyses (Larsen, 1997; Hansen, 2001) traditionally have a focus on the systems of signification shaping the policy options available to foreign policy decision-makers at both national and to a lesser extent European levels. They propose interesting insights in the linguistic structures enabling and constraining the formulation of foreign policy which arguably no study in the beliefs or cognitive dispositions of the actors could bring with comparable accuracy and reliability. In our case however they can only acknowledge a discursive change from a “civilian power” to a “full instrumental power” discourse (Larsen, 2004) but give little clue as to how, why and when such a change has come about.

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<sup>1</sup> Work in progress : please do not quote without the permission of the author. Comments however most welcomed !

The emphasis of speech act approaches on agents and change might help overcome this crucial shortcoming. While it has been extensively applied to security studies, little has been done yet to introduce it in the field of foreign policy<sup>2</sup>. The securitisation approach (Buzan, Waever and de Wilde, 1998) seems however to provide a fruitful tool to analyse the social construction of a particular European security issue, that of conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa. The social interplay between EU member States and institutions can indeed be studied through the role and impact of their respective discourses.

This approach claims that the scope and content of security threats cannot be analysed objectively but that they depend on the successful utterance of a particular discursive mechanism. A political actor addresses an audience about a lethal threat to a referent object (most often the survival of the State or the nation), and claims that ordinary rules need to be breached to grant him exceptional powers to prevent the threat and restore security. Such a securitising move is successful if the audience is convinced of the existence of the threat and comes to view such exceptional measures as necessary if only on a temporary basis. Securitisation fails when the speaker does not manage to get the support of his audience, when “necessity” does not occur.

### **Whose security? Securitisation processes in the formulation of EU foreign and security policy**

Normative references to both humanitarian imperatives and security interests have largely been used to legitimise and foster the reinforcement of European foreign and security capacities throughout the 1990s. Securitisation discourses have been used to claim that regional conflicts had proliferated in Africa in the post-Cold War era (which could be debated), and that they represented a new threat the EU had to deal with. In a word, these discourses have “brought about a change in the world by representing it as having been changed” (Searle, 1999: 150).

These African conflicts have moreover been constructed discursively as two different forms of threats:

- On the one hand regional instability in Africa has been depicted as a threat in relation to immigration, terrorism, arms and drug smuggling. Analysing these securitising moves might therefore open promising insights into how and why African stability has been designed as a stake of importance for European security and put up on the European agenda in a manner that crosses over all three pillars of EU policies.
- On the other hand African regional instability has been characterised as a necessity *per se*, in order to prevent further massacres and civil wars, thereby helping to legitimise the creation of new instruments (ESDP) and the transformation of older EU policies such as development cooperation. The referent object in this case is not European; it is the sheer survival of African civilians that is at stake.

The main difference between these two securitisation processes is that in the latter case the audience and the referent object do not refer to the same group of people. In the case of what we would term “humanitarian securitisation” a speaker addresses an audience to convince them that the survival of another group (African civilians) is at stake and that they should allow him to breach the normal rules and take exceptional measures to stop the massacre.

While Africa has only rarely been described as a threat for the EU, securitisation processes still have been at work which can account for the scale and innovations of the EU involvement in African conflicts. These discourses have helped breaking new grounds in the development of EU foreign and security policy, by overriding existing rules and establishing new ones in reference to a humanitarian imperative.

The most obvious example is the traditional allocation of development aid exclusively to development activities. The EU has begun to fund African military deployments in Burundi and Ivory Coast in 2002 and 2003 on the basis that “security is a prerequisite for development”, a discourse now enshrined in the Cotonou Agreement. Such a discourse has allowed not only for an exception to be made, but for a revolution to take place in the practice of EU development cooperation. This sweeping change has later been institutionalised in an EU-ACP agreement on a 250M€ Peace Facility for Africa already used in Darfur and Chad and probably soon in Somalia and Congo DRC.

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<sup>2</sup> This is all the more surprising as some researchers have prominently invested both fields. Waever however points out to future promising applications of speech act theory to foreign policy in one of his latest writings (2004: 212).

## **Operationalising speech act analysis**

Even though its scope and ambition are much narrower than those of “securitisation”, the concept of “humanitarian securitisation” therefore proves an interesting tool to analyse the first developments of ESDP and the incremental use of development cooperation for security-related activities. Such speech acts are at work at both the national and the European levels and therefore manage to study EFP as “the sum of what the EU and its member states do in foreign policy” (Hill). Several major changes in EU foreign policy in the 1990s could arguably be accounted for as the product of a specific humanitarian discourse legitimising the breaking of many implicit rules which were limiting the EU involvement in African security. Beyond the obvious case of the allocation of development funds to non-ODA activities, other elements could be explored:

- The civilian nature of EU integration has been abandoned with the integration of the first concrete defence component in the Treaty (the humanitarian “Petersberg tasks” in the Amsterdam treaty, although not exclusively related to Africa).
- The understanding that NATO held a right of first refusal was breached with the launch of operation Artemis in 2003. Even though autonomous operations had been formally envisaged since the Saint Malo agreement, it was arguably a concession made by Atlanticist member states as a remote perspective on which NATO would hold a pre-emptive right.
- The regional scope of potential EU military operations has been extended far beyond the Balkans despite previous understanding (“Food for thought” paper) and a strong initial opposition from some member states.
- The Conservative argument that ESDP amounted to a loss of sovereignty (and the creation of a “European army”) was overridden by the UK Labour government when it proposed the concept of Battle Groups originally called “Battle groups for Africa”. The African destination of the EU Battle groups was repeated by Tony Blair in his domestic media campaign on Africa in November 2004.
- The necessity of a clear legal basis for EU activities was almost silently breached to allow the Council headquarters the first steps of the EU in the field of military cooperation (planning support for the AU deployment in Darfur without any legal basis) and security sector reform (Operation EUSEC in Congo DRC, forthcoming).

A representative set of EU and national foreign policy statements on crisis management in Africa will be analysed to identify and define in each case:

- the actors who have supported and “uttered” these changes: France, Britain and Belgium and a few officials in the Commission,
- the actors who have tried to oppose them with competing speech acts: neutral member states and other officials within the Commission,
- the referent object constructed in their respective discourses: African civilians, specific ethnic groups or humanity as a whole?,
- their audience: Council working groups, COPS and national public debates,
- the European identity that these discourses are constructing and promoting (a “European responsibility” in Africa),
- the external and institutional “conditions of satisfaction” of these securitising moves (evolution of the international context, particular crises, internal developments). How to account for instance for instance for the French failure to convince the EU to take part in Operation Turquoise in 1994 (de La Guérvivière, 1996) and of its success with Operation Artemis in 2003?

Lastly attention could be paid to the post-9/11 references to terrorism and immigration from Africa which have recently emerged in European discourses and to their potential impact on European foreign policies.

## **Outstanding theoretical issues**

For all its success the concept of securitisation has rarely been applied to a delimited case study. We have so far tried to show how useful the concept of “humanitarian securitisation” could be, but it

remains to be seen how usable it is. The speech act approach needs in this respect to be tested against competing hypotheses and approaches.

Most importantly our use of speech act does not entail that actors do not have interests, that there is no reality “out there” or that the latter is impossible to know. It might therefore well be conceived as complementary to other approaches like structural discourse analyses (Larsen, 2004; Hansen and Waever, 2001), FPA approaches (White, 2001), social institutionalism (Carlsnaes, 2002) or classical realism. Their theoretical compatibility would however need to be thoroughly assessed, particularly in relation to the structure-agent debate. Complementarity indeed does not necessarily entail consistency. More specifically it remains unclear whether securitisation speech acts function as perlocutionary or illocutionary acts (Austin, 1962). As Buzan, Waever and de Wilde put it: “Since securitisation can never be only imposed, there is some need to argue one’s case” (1998: 25). The reference to Austin, who concentrated on illocutionary acts, would therefore be partly misleading as securitisation speech acts would function it seems as performatives before they manage to establish the social reality of a threat and become illocutionary. Other speech act theorists (Butler, 1997; Bourdieu, 1982; Searle, 1999) could therefore more fruitfully be referred to whose debates have been to some extent mirrored in the field of security studies (Waever, 1998; Bigo, 1998).

The implementation and impact of the EU foreign policy could also be partly analysed in terms of speech acts, not least its conflict prevention and crisis management policies (Albert, Diez and Stetter, 2004).

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