

Introduction

In considering EU foreign policy in practice, this book argues that a specific focus on practitioners' (diplomats, bureaucrats, and public officials) interactions can offer insight into the way EU foreign policy is practised. An assessment of the practices of practitioners through a new type of data set and a new discursive framework demonstrates the significance of European identity, collective interests, and the role that normative and moral concerns play for EU practitioners when they consider EU foreign policy in the eastern neighbourhood. It also highlights that these four concepts are interlinked when they consider the policy, despite the commonly accepted understanding, even by practitioners, that the EU is a normative power in global affairs. These findings are relevant not only for understanding current developments in EU foreign policy, but also for allowing scholars, as well as practitioners, to move away from considering the EU exclusively as a normative power but perceiving it as a more complex power with a collective 'European' identity, collective understandings of European norms that are linked to collective moral concerns that at the same time all link to collective European interests. Currently there is a lot of discussion regarding the EU becoming a resilient, or pragmatic power. Only time and EU actions will tell what these terms mean in practice. However, this book is a testament to the fact that practitioners have always considered EU foreign policy beyond the normative. In this introduction I begin by providing some context for the book, followed by an explanation of, and rationale for, its theoretical and methodological approach, as well as an outline of the rest of the book's structure.

The EU, including its earlier formations, is a major economic and political actor in the region. It was so even before the collapse of the Soviet Union, and has retained this status after the resurgence of Russia as the other main regional power. The EU is a complex actor with twenty-eight member states,¹ all of which have bilateral relationships with Russia and the other eastern neighbouring states, despite the common EU policy in the regions. This situation is the result of some clever manoeuvrings from President Putin, specifically in the energy policy he supports which is Russia's de facto foreign policy in the region. Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova's geographical location between the EU and

Russia make them interesting for both regional actors. For Russia, they are directly within the Russian sphere of influence: historically they belonged to Soviet Union, and before that to the Russian Empire. For the EU, they offer a chance to exercise normative power in the region and to create a safe, secure, and stable neighbourhood where countries are more similar to EU member states. Ukraine's struggle to decide which regional actor's sphere of influence it would rather belong to creates an issue. This is no easy decision. Being caught between two regional actors both of whom want to assert themselves through their relations with Ukraine only problematises this decision. While Ukraine is particularly important because of its size, history, and the energy transit pipelines delivering Russia gas and oil to the EU, the region as a whole became strategically important after the last EU enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Ever since, more and more studies consider the eastern neighbourhood of the EU as a collective region to study. The development of the Eastern Partnership in 2009 is also a testament to recognising the eastern neighbourhood as a collective which shares specific concerns. However, no one has yet examined how EU practitioners, who are directly responsible for policy developments in the eastern neighbourhood, consider this policy domain.

This leads to the theoretical reasons behind this study. Focusing on practices and practitioners is not entirely new. The practice turn in International Relations (IR) was initiated by Vincent Pouliot in his PhD thesis, which was later published in 2010 as *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO–Russia Diplomacy*. This was followed by a volume entitled *International Practices* in 2011 edited by Emmanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot. By Adler and Pouliot's own admission, the practice turn focuses on the practices of IR, rather than just the theoretical approaches that explain it. Inherently, it aims to combine theory and practice. However, the practice turn is still a relatively novel way of considering IR, despite McCourt's (2016) rash claim of already being the new constructivism; and only more recently have attempts been made to apply it to EU foreign policy. This means that the theoretical implications of the practice turn are relatively understudied, and hence offer many opportunities for further research in both IR theory and EU studies.² Furthermore, since most of the scholars who engage with the practice turn predominantly use policy documents, non-recorded elite interviews, news items, or autobiographies to investigate these practices, there is an opportunity to use different methods. This leads to the final reason behind this study: methodology.

Suppose we turn to different kinds of data to trace these practices, such as transcripts of conversations where practitioners openly discuss specific policy focuses? Through this new direction, our focus changes from what is being said, to what these practitioners achieve through their talk. Or, put differently, our focus turns to the social action of talk, and their impact on policy development. Using verbatim data from practitioners is practically unheard of. Diplomats rarely go on record, for many reasons, ranging from personal reservation to

INTRODUCTION

security. By using verbatim transcripts of conversations and by focusing on the sequential organisation of talk, this study offers an innovative way of analysing practitioners and their practices. To be clear, the aim is not to expose each individual position of the EU practitioners' participating in the study, or to link them to their respective member states' positions, or to check whether they truly represent EU positions. Rather, this study seeks to understand how these practitioners make sense of the policy. Therefore, their anonymity and confidentiality is not compromised by the transcripts. This is crucial. While it would be possible to draw such comparisons, it would have been impossible to have the practitioners on record. What these transcripts do reveal, however, is that there is a distinctly collective understanding of this policy area, to which practitioners ascribe regardless of their nationality, rank, or the EU institution they work for. This shared understanding revolves around four concerns: identity, normative and moral concerns, and collective interests. As I argue, there is already an indication that EU practitioners are perceiving EU foreign policy more as a multifaceted power than official documents would allow it to be until the new EU Global Strategy (EU HR/VP 2016) comes into force.³ In addition to this very specific understanding of this policy area, the transcripts show the way in which the EU approximates itself to Russia as the other power in the region. They also identify that EU practitioners predominantly still view the EU as a normative actor, or what Manners coined a normative power.⁴ Finally, the transcripts reveal several excellent negotiating techniques that EU practitioners possess, either through training or experience. But, at the same time, the transcripts suggest that practitioners ought to be more careful and reconsider using specific discursive formulations that link the EU to moral authority in its eastern neighbourhood. Implying moral authority can potentially be dangerous and could harm EU interest in the long term, especially if the EU does not deliver on, for example, augmented support and closer cooperation with Ukraine in order not to aggravate its relations with Russia.

As a result, this book establishes a strategic link between theory, methodology, and practice. I argue that by paying attention to the social action of talk, that is, what EU practitioners achieve through interaction, we have a better understanding of foreign policy practices. These interactional accounts also offer us a clearer insight into how practitioners manage key IR concepts such as identity, normative, moral, and collective interest concerns. Furthermore, they allow us to observe how these four notions are dependent on each other during policy development rather than any one taking priority over the others. Building on poststructuralist IR theory and on discursive psychology's theory of social action, I show that this interdependency is a significant step for poststructuralist IR theory as well as IR practice theory. I put forward a new analytical framework to capture practice, namely Discursive International Relations (DIR), which includes a new conceptual model the Discourse Practice Model (DPM) to help to recognise specific practices through identifying social

action, fact, interest formulations, and agency. DIR also serves our understanding of EU foreign policy development and helps us to establish the kind of actor, or power that the EU is.

To demonstrate this, the book focuses on EU foreign policy vis-à-vis its eastern neighbours, namely Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. It argues that the practitioners who develop EU policy with respect to these countries distinguish these neighbours as European; in contrast to southern neighbours, or even Turkey, a candidate state. While they acknowledge the normative role that the EU plays in the eastern region, and its vocational or moral responsibility to do so, practitioners also remain acutely aware of the collective EU interest in the region, particularly in the security of energy supplies. As a result, this book reveals a dual impetus in which closer ties with eastern European countries is not merely a matter of moral concern, or of clarifying issues of identity for the EU, but also of protecting the EU's own interests. In short, these notions are connected and exist in parallel to each other, when practitioners consider EU foreign policy, rather than favouring one notion over the other. This book also argues that, in understanding European foreign policy towards its eastern neighbours, practitioners draw upon dichotomised categories combined with various discursive devices that effectively work to fragment 'European' identity and to dilute the EU's moral authority in the region, if the focus at the end is seen to be on EU collective interests. This will have implications for practices of EU foreign policy.

Structure of the book

This book is split into two parts: theory and practice. In Part I, I develop the theoretical and methodological framework to study foreign policy practices through practitioners' interaction. Chapter 1 examines the ways in which practitioners are studied. I begin by a general examination of the practice turn, starting with Theodore R. Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina, and Eike von Savigny's (2001) renowned edited volume *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*. In this distinguished collection of essays, I focus on the more general approaches on the use of practice theory by Schatzki, Turner, and Rouse to the more specific ones such as Lynch's contribution that links language, practice theory, ethnomethodology, and conversation analysis (CA). Lynch's argument serves as the theoretical base for the contribution of this book to the practice turn. Next, I focus on the application of practice theory in IR and more recently in EU studies. Although there is a clear divide between conduct and more linguist-based approaches, both groups focus on practices and social action, hence the division is methodological rather than theoretical. Furthermore, this division presents a clear research gap that this study addresses through its focus on identifying the social actions achieved through practitioners' interactions.

INTRODUCTION

Following on from this, Chapter 2 outlines the new methodology used to study social action of practitioners' interaction. I propose a new framework DIR and the application of the DPM. DPM has four main features: social action, fact/interest formulations, agency, and IR practice, and focuses on the speakers' communicational practice and interactions. This chapter also considers data collection and the methodological and ethical implications of using recorded elite research interviews.

Part II of this book focuses on practice. Each chapter centres around one particular topic such as identity, norms, moral concerns, and collective interests, and I examine these concepts through verbatim transcripts of talk from a large data set collected from EU practitioners. To the corpus, I apply the DPM and build these four collections by focusing on the social action achieved by practitioners in interactions. In Chapter 3, I introduce the different constructs of the category of the 'European'. The two main patterns that emerge from the corpus are EU practitioners differentiating between 'European' neighbours (e.g. Ukraine), potential neighbours (such as the South Caucasus and Kazakhstan), and non-European neighbours (including Morocco, Egypt, Algeria, and, significantly, Turkey). In drawing up criteria for outlining what is European (or the category entitlement of the 'European'), practitioners draw on geography, culture, history, economics, and heredity accounts of European civilisation.

In Chapter 4, I consider the ways in which EU practitioners account for the normative role and power of the EU in the eastern neighbourhood. There are four dominant patterns that emerge from the data. These are: what practitioners actually understand by norms; the reasons behind neighbouring countries wanting to emulate the EU model; what practitioners identify as specific concerns over non-compliance; and the ways in which practitioners perpetuate a very EU-centric view of the world. Chapter 5 examines how EU practitioners justify their vocational interest in the region through: claims of moral duty; communicating the 'right' message; identifying neighbours who have different moral concerns and recognising when it is morally wrong to be involved in a country. In the final analytical chapter (Chapter 6), I demonstrate that practitioners not only consider identity, norms, and the EU's moral obligation in the regions but also collective security interests. Their pragmatism surpasses the common expectation and ways that the EU has been perceived. The corpus revealed many different collective EU interests in the region such as migration, terrorism, organised crime, and the environment, but energy security seems to prevail. The three main patterns emerging from the data are: the ways in which they identify energy interests as the collective EU interest in the eastern neighbourhood; their claims to future plans for managing the collective EU concerns over energy supplies; and, finally, the ways in which they justify collective EU interest in the region through moral concerns and the vocation attributes the EU has for the eastern neighbours.

In the Conclusion, I reflect on the main findings of the book and the theoretical and methodological contributions that these findings make to IR practice theory and EU studies. I also consider the practical relevance of my research for EU practitioners and for their practice.

Notes

- 1 This will change to 27 as soon as the EU and the UK agree on an exit deal following the Referendum held in the UK on 24 June 2016, and the invoking of Article 50. It is beyond the scope of this book to cover the impact that Brexit will have on EU foreign policy. The only remark I would like to make on the topic is that losing UK military capabilities will have minimal impact on future EU military competencies, especially concerning the EU becoming more pragmatic also about using its military capabilities. If anything, the UK leaving the EU will only give way to further developments in EU defence.
- 2 More on this, including a review of the literature, in Chapter 1.
- 3 The EU Global Strategy deliberately opts for not describing the EU as a specific type of power. Having said that in her foreword, High Representative/Vice-President Frederica Mogherini draws attention to the fact that the EU cannot only rely on its soft power, and nor should it be exclusively considered as a civilian power, since the EU has more capabilities including military and defence competencies. Furthermore, the language used in the EU Global Strategy indicates that the EU wants to be seen as more pragmatic, or, more precisely, apply principled pragmatism to its external relations. The trouble at the moment with this concept is that it is unclear what it actually means. The EU has to face up to the changing nature of the global order and how it wants to fit into this new order.
- 4 This is the case despite the fact that most of the EU practitioners who participated in the study had not heard of, read, or been taught the concept of normative power. They could not, for example, name Ian Manners or any other scholar engaged in the topic.