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EU Diplomacy Papers

5 / 2009

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Abstract*

This paper analyses the degree of European Union (EU) actorness within the Group of Eight (G8). Drawing on the work of Jupille and Caporaso, actorness is probed along the criteria of 'recognition', 'authority', 'autonomy' and 'cohesion'. We argue that the vague and informal nature of the G8 is conducive to EU participation in the summit. The system of EU representation within the G8 can be seen as a case of constructed ambiguity because the ambiguity that is inherent in the EU's participation has been institutionalized within the G8. When assessing the above criteria, actorness of the EU as a whole remains questionable. However, recognition, authority, autonomy and most of all cohesion differ considerably per context. We suggest that the 'independence' aspect of 'autonomy' constitutes a weakness in the conceptualisation of actorness and may better be replaced by 'proactivity'. Finally, on the basis of our findings it can be tentatively hypothesised that a number of factors condition EU actorness in the G8, including the degree of integration at EU level, the degree of politicisation and whether or not an EU member state is acting as G8 host.

* A previous version of this paper has been presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops in Lisbon in April 2009. We thank the participants of the workshop on the 'EU in the World Economy' for their valuable comments and Katie Fobear for her competent research assistance.

1. Introduction: EU Actorness in the G8

Since 1977, only two years after the first summit in Rambouillet, the EU/EC has been officially represented at every G7/G8 summit. But in what capacity (and as what sort of actor) is the EU, a regional organisation, present in the group of (the) eight supposedly richest and most powerful states? As a member? As a participant? And what constitutes EU representation at all? As many as six European representatives can be attending the summit: France, Germany, Italy, the UK, the European Commission and the country holding the EU Presidency. While the individual EU Member States attend the summit first and foremost to represent their national interests, the Commission and the Council Presidency are to represent the EU as a whole.

This study focuses on the extent to which the EU constitutes an international actor within the G8 framework. The concept of actorness sheds light on the unique entity that the European Union entails in the arena of international politics. Not yet a state, but no ordinary regional organization either, the EU constitutes its own category.¹ Actorness looks at the capacity to act, that is, "the ability to function actively and deliberately in relations to other actors in the international system".² The concept of actorness recognizes the patchy and uneven nature of the international capabilities of the EU, while also considering the fact that the Community possesses some of the characteristics of the typical actors in the international system, but lacks others, hereby creating its own unique dynamic. For a conceptualisation of actorness we draw on the work of Jupille and Caporaso who have specified four criteria of actorness that we will use for our empirical analysis: recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion.³

Both the EU and the G8 are international organizations, but stand in (sharp) contrast to each other. While the EU constitutes a unique player in international relations – no other international organization has such a level of supranationalism and at the same time such an international presence – the G8 can be considered an informal group, or a form of 'concert diplomacy', based on informal rules that mainly serve to coordinate policy.⁴ It has been suggested that their distinct characteristics make these two organizations mutually compatible: while the G8 does well in determining guidelines and giving impulses to other bodies, the EU has the operational capacity to realize them.⁵

Overall, the role (and particularly the actorness) of the EU in the G8 is substantially under-researched. Considering the interesting circumstances of this issue/case, it is surprising that hardly any scholarly work has (so far) been done on the role of the EU within the G8 summits. Such research has merely been historical in nature and entailed a G8 perspective. This contribution hopes to fill this gap by

¹ Ginsberg 1999: 432.

² Sjöstedt 1977: 15.

³ Jupille and Caporaso 1998.

⁴ Fischer 2001; Schwegmann 2001.

⁵ Lamy 1988; Kirton 2004; Welch 2008.

focusing on the present and taking a predominantly EU perspective. In addition, we seek to draw more attention to this case, which provides insights both into the international potential (and especially actorness) of the EU, and the specific setting of the G8.

We argue that the role of the EU within the G8 summit proves to be ambiguous. The G8 case underlines the hybrid nature of the EU: an actor in some cases, while not in others. In this study, the claim is made that this ambiguity is constructed, as all G8 and EU participants have consciously chosen the current set-up of the EU representation. This set-up inherently contains overlaps, contradictions and other difficulties, hence the term 'constructed ambiguity'. The informal nature of the summit enables the EU to pursue actorness in some contexts, while staying in the background of others. This ambiguity has been institutionalized within the G8, by granting both the Commission and the Council Presidency (and four individual Member States) permission to attend the summit. Although potentially problematic, the flexibility of the G8 system has until today provided the solution to possible objections that can be raised against this constructed ambiguity. It seems that all participants are aware of the possible pitfalls of the current system, but that as long as nobody tries to solve the constructed ambiguity, no problems appear. Or more succinctly, instead of solving the ambiguity of the EU as an international actor, the G8 has embraced it, by constructing a system that institutionalizes this ambiguity.

As mentioned, EU representation is dual. Since the role of the President of the Council is shown to be limited, this analysis mainly focuses on the recognition of the European Commission as an actor. Nonetheless, the main object of our research remains EU actorness as opposed to Commission actorness, since the former captures an interesting phenomenon, namely that two (or six if you like) EU representatives have a seat at the summit table.

We proceed as follows: first we review the relevant literature and specify the conceptual framework. Thereafter, we probe the four categories of actorness in the G8 setting in sections two (on recognition), three (authority), four (autonomy), and five (cohesion). We conclude, amongst other things, with a few thoughts regarding the adequacy of the framework for conceptualising the EU role in the G8.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Conceptual Approaches to the EU's International Role

Mainstream International Relations (IR) theory struggles to adequately conceptualise the EU and its external relations as it tends to focus on statehood and rationality. Since the EU is neither a state nor has clearly defined interests enabling fully rational behaviour, the EU cannot be regarded as a fully-fledged player in international relations.⁶ The EU has been termed a 'heterodox unit of analysis', referring to its unique but ambiguous dynamic.⁷ It has thus been rightly asserted that losing the state-centric focus will make us more able to appreciate the EU's influence in

⁶ Rosamond 2005: 465.

⁷ Hill & Smith 2005: 19.

international politics, as a state-centric approach would exclude much of what is distinctive and significant about the EU.⁸

Another problem of conventional IR theory is the unique nature of the EU, which makes it, despite attempts to fit the EU into theories of regionalization⁹, hard to generalize. The view of the EU as *sui generis* offers an alternative approach on the evaluation of the international role of the EU. It considers the EU a separate category, and contains different perspectives of looking at the unique international potential of the EU. As for the role of the EU within the G8, a case in which the EU is distinct from other participants, but still has a considerable influence, this approach seems very suitable in this context. As Marsh and Mackenstein note, "the *sui generis* nature of the EU means that international organizations and fora vary in their willingness to recognize it as an actor in its own right as opposed to its constituent Member States. This leads, in turn, to substantial variations in the rights of the EC in different international organizations".¹⁰ Thus, in the context of representation in international organizations, the *sui generis* character of the EU is especially clearly expressed. In this respect, authors have looked at the position of the EU in several international fora, such as the UN, the IMF and the WTO, while the EU's role within the G8 has been largely neglected.

The way in which we look at the EU is largely defined by our conceptual underpinnings. The ambiguous nature of the international role of the EU is what has constituted such a variety of perspectives concerning this issue. The most obvious possibility is to look at the extent of statehood that the EU possesses. In this view, the EU is compared to other state-actors in the international system. While it is quite clear that the EU currently does not fit the standard idea of statehood, some scholars are convinced that the *sui generis* character of the Union refers only to its present stage, which is to develop further towards a European federation.¹¹

Increasing attention is devoted to the question which type of 'power' the EU constitutes in its international relations. Since the early 1970s it has been debated to what extent the EU can be described as a civilian power.¹² While this debate still has some currency, in the past few years attention has increasingly shifted to the (potential) normative power of the EU.¹³ The promising normative power research agenda is in the process of attaining a more systematic empirical focus¹⁴ after several years of largely conceptual discussion). Both concepts, that of civilian (or civilising¹⁵ and normative power, appear to be applicable, in a sensible way, only in cases where EU actorness is largely undisputed, which is not the case here.

The interpretation of the EU as an identifiable and coherent 'active identity' focuses on its pursuit of relationships with states and groups of states through a

⁸ Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 12; Allen & Smith 1990: 19.

⁹ cf. Hveem 2000: 72.

¹⁰ Marsh & Mackenstein 2005: 56.

¹¹ Tiilikainen 2001: 234.

¹² Duchêne 1972; cf. Orbie 2006.

¹³ Manners 2002.

¹⁴ e.g. Whitman 2009 forthcoming.

¹⁵ Hyde-Price 2006: 227.

number of instruments.¹⁶ A similarly ideational perspective is that of the EU as an 'international order', which perceives the EU as a subsystem of international relations and its structural power as an international order based upon its material capabilities, the characteristics of its institutions and the nature of its prevailing ideas.¹⁷

The most quoted and concrete concepts are 'presence' and 'actorness'. Both concepts can account for the multidimensional nature of the international position of the EU. They perceive the EU as unique in terms of its character and identity, and consider the EU as part of a new multi-actor global system.¹⁸ Both internal dynamics of the EU and the external environment in which the EU is placed are deemed influential. Presence is the less tangible concept, as it focuses not only on EU influence, but also on whether this influence is deemed legitimate and perceived to be important by the other international actors.¹⁹ Actorness takes presence a step further in that it implies a larger scope for EU action and emphasises the EU's possibility to function actively and deliberately in international politics.²⁰

There are two reasons for preferring the concept of actorness (rather than presence) as our point of departure here: first EU presence in international politics tends to be taken for granted by authors, while EU actorness is a much more contested, and thus meriting empirical probing.²¹ Second, EU actorness has already been found as partially existing in a study that assessed EU action in the early 1990s²², while the EU's foreign policy procedures and instruments as well as the EU's own claims for constituting an actor on the world scene have further progressed since.

2.2 *The Concept of Actorness*

The term 'actor capability' was first coined by Sjöstedt in 1977 to account for the new presence of the European Community in the international arena and to envisage the extent to which the EC would constitute an actor in the future.²³ His understanding of actorness recognized the patchy and uneven nature of the international capabilities of the EC, while also considering that the Community possessed some of the characteristics of the typical actors in the international system, but lacked others, hereby creating its own unique dynamic. To Sjöstedt, actor capability is not an absolute capability which one has or has not, but should be considered a degree of a quality that an entity may or may not possess. His criteria for actorness are delimitation from other actors, autonomy (or sovereignty), and the possession of a number of state-like characteristics, such as having a community of interests, a system for 'normal' decision-making, for controlling

¹⁶ Manners & Whitman 1998: 238.

¹⁷ Smith 2007.

¹⁸ Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 13; Hill 1993: 308.

¹⁹ Allen & Smith 1990: 19-37; Rosamond 2005: 465.

²⁰ cf. Smith 2003: 24.

²¹ Smith 1996: 248; Ginsberg 1999: 432; Hill 1993: 308.

²² Jupille and Caporaso 1998.

²³ Sjöstedt 1977.

Community resources and for crisis management as well a network of external agents and external channels of communication.²⁴

The concept of actorness has social constructivist roots. It recognizes the significance of social processes that shape the actors' identities and provide contexts in which action is constrained or enabled.²⁵ Ginsberg's interpretation of actor capability, for example, acknowledges the interplay between national actors, European actors, and Europeanized institutional norms and practices. This process interacts with the international context, after which it returns to the input side of the process: this is where perceptions of actorness can feed back to actual actorness. This means that not merely capacities and functions within the international system, but also perceptions, i.e. ideational forces, are relevant.²⁶

Actorness enables us to consider the EU as a distinct category, departing from the classic debates of neofunctionalism and intergovernmentalism or realism and liberalism.²⁷ On the other hand, actorness still presumes a great deal of state-like properties, as for instance Sjöstedt identifies them. As has been suggested, if the EU wants to join the 'game', it will have to play, to some extent, according to the rules of this (state-dominated) game.²⁸ At the same time increased actorness is often associated with increasing supranationalism in the policy process and less actorness with intergovernmentalism.²⁹ Thus, actorness to some extent departs from the standard tenets of traditional IR and European integration theory, but not completely, making it a hybrid concept that should be well-suited to shed light on a hybrid context, such as the role of a multi-level (and significantly supranationalised) regional organisation within a more weakly institutionalised concert diplomacy.

Throughout the decades a considerable number of slightly differing approaches to actorness have been developed, each using their own criteria. Not all these frameworks are equally suitable here. While Sjöstedt's work is conceptually inspiring, his properties focus excessively on internal characteristics and are mainly appropriate for general application to the case of the EU and hard to apply to a specific case. Ginsberg focuses on decision-making structures in his framework, an approach that is too narrow for the *ad hoc* structure of the case of the G8.³⁰ Bretherton and Vogler, on the other hand, take a broad approach by focusing on opportunity, presence and capability.³¹ As these criteria are quite vague and encompassing, the possibilities for operationalization are limited.

Authors have also defined the concept of actorness in somewhat different ways. For us, actorness is about the EU's 'capacity to act'³², i.e. "the ability to function actively and deliberately in relations to other actors in the international

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bretherton & Vogler 2006: 13.

²⁶ Ginsberg 1999: 435; Hill 1993.

²⁷ Ginsberg 1999: 447.

²⁸ Rosamond 2005: 466; Tiilikainen 2001: 223.

²⁹ Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007: 969.

³⁰ Ginsberg 1999: 429-454.

³¹ Bretherton & Vogler 2006.

³² Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 214.

system".³³ We reject the understanding that actorness equals influence. Instead, we suggest that actorness *enables* influence, without necessarily entailing the latter.

2.3 Conceptual Framework and Indicators of Actorness

Our point of departure is the approach stipulated by Jupille and Caporaso who consider the EU a hybrid and ambiguous international entity, in a constant state of development. They acknowledge the different degrees of actorness over time, issue and negotiation partner, making their framework suitable for application to different cases. Their critique on previous contributions to the actorness debate is that these lack clear criteria for determining the status of the EU as an actor. Jupille and Caporaso, therefore, devise four clear criteria for ascertaining actorness, for which they also partly stipulate indicators. The criteria are not absolute, suggesting – in line with the formulation of our main research question – that actorness is a matter of degree. Moreover, one should consider the criteria to be tools to not only assess actor capability, but also to describe the specific kind of actorness that the EU represents.

The four criteria are recognition, authority, autonomy and cohesion. A number of additional indicators, here complemented by relevant specifying questions, have been derived from them, creating practical tools for (further) research:

(1) *Recognition*: This criterion entails acceptance and interaction by and with the organization, other members and third parties. More acceptance and interaction increases actorness. Has the EU delegation been officially/formally recognized by the G8 (and its members) and/or does it have a substantial legal status within the G8? At least as important is *de facto* recognition: is the G8 as an organization making 'use' of the EU and involving it in the summit process? Is the EU representation *de facto* recognized by other members and third parties, such as the media, the public and academic observers? Are other G8 members and third parties interacting with the EU?

(2) *Authority*: in this respect, one needs to ask, for instance, whether the EU has legal competence to act on a given subject matter. Is authority delegated by Member States to EU institutions? Is there a clear mandate? Substantial competence and a clear mandate will result in more authority. In the case of mixed competence, what is the practice that has evolved within the G8 context? Here, formal authority may be limited, but can still result in considerable actorness, as in practice the EU may still hold informal authority.³⁴ What is the decision-making procedure at the EU level on G8 matters (qualified majority voting or unanimity)? What are the legal instruments that are available to the representation of the EU within the G8 summit? While regulations, decisions and also directives imply considerable authority, recommendations and opinions suggest a limited amount of authority.

³³ Sjöstedt 1977: 15.

³⁴ Rhinard & Kaeding 2006.

(3) *Autonomy*: this criterion distinguishes between distinctiveness and independence. When the EU holds institutional distinctiveness and independence from other actors, its actorness will increase. First, it needs to be inquired, whether the EU has a distinctive institutional apparatus within the G8, in relation to the other EU Member States and other third actors. Second, in terms independence, it needs to be asked, whether there is discretionary goal formation, decision-making and implementation? For independence to be present, the distinct institutions “should make a difference, compared to the baseline expectation of a decentralized state system working on the basis of power and interest”.³⁵

(4) *Cohesion*: Jupille and Caporaso distinguish between four dimensions of cohesion, the presence of which fosters EU actorness: (1) value cohesion: does the EU express common basic goals within the G8?; (2) tactical cohesion: are possible diverging goals made to fit with one another by issue linkage and side payments to increase cohesion?; (3) procedural cohesion: does consensus exist within the EU representation as to how to process issues of conflict and on the rules and procedures regarding this?; (4) output cohesion: Does the EU as a whole succeed in formulating policies within the G8, regardless of substantive and procedural agreement? And finally, it should be asked, whether the different forms of cohesion allow for ambitious EU positions, lowest common denominator EU positions, or just unilateral action.³⁶

A few difficulties in working with these criteria must be identified prior to the main analysis. One of the strongest criticisms on Jupille and Caporaso’s conceptualisation of actorness is that a negative result on one criterion will probably lead to a negative result on most others. This also implies that all criteria are closely interlinked, making it hard to firmly distinguish one from the other.³⁷ This research aims to show though that despite the interconnectedness of the criteria, their assessments may vary considerably.

Another problem that can be identified is the relation between autonomy and cohesion. It is not unlikely that more cohesion will lead to less autonomy, as a more cohesive European representation may result in a less distinctive EU contribution. This begs the question whether or not autonomy is an adequate criterion for actorness at all, or whether cohesion might be too much to expect. These potential problems will be further explored through the case analysis.

2.4 A Note on Source Material and Delimitation

There are hardly any academic sources available on the role of the EU within the G8 framework. Most works are outdated and therefore cannot be used for more than background information. In addition, the G8 has no secretariat and therefore only very limited documentation. The only documents that are produced are press statements referring to the communiqués. There are no official records on any of the

³⁵ Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 217.

³⁶ Ibid.: 218-220, 225-226.

³⁷ Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007: 972.

discussions held at the summit since the entire format is informal and off the record. As a result, a vital data source for us have been interviews with those involved in the preparations and the summit itself (even though G8 officials are extremely difficult to interview since the G8 constitutes a closed circle of people). Another alternative source that has been made use of is (participant) observation. The first author was accredited to the Hokkaido Toyako summit in Japan as a journalist. By interacting with media and experts, and observing the dynamic at the summit, some valuable information could be extracted. In addition, we explored press statements, summit websites and media reports/articles.

To ensure that the research is feasible, delimitation is necessary. Potentially one could choose to focus only on a limited number of issue areas. However, preliminary research has displayed that, considering the informal nature of the summit, it is impossible to identify strict demarcations between differing issue areas. In addition, considering the limited source material, the vast agenda and limited attention given to anyone issue, and the changing agenda from year to year, focusing on a limited number of issue areas will most likely not produce an adequate amount of data. In order to realize this study, we could not afford to zoom in too closely, as the means to paint a detailed picture are unfortunately limited.

Nonetheless, two issues have stood out in our research: climate change and nuclear energy.³⁸ The two subjects are contrasting examples in that EU influence on the first is much more considerable than on the second. While not focusing on these issues exclusively, they have been used as examples throughout this research. Our analysis concentrates on data obtained concerning the recent summits of Sea Island 2004, Gleneagles 2005, St. Petersburg 2006, Heiligendamm 2007 and Hokkaido Toyako 2008.

3. Recognition

Recognition can both be *de jure* or *de facto*. *De jure* or formal recognition refers to official membership and participation. *De facto* acceptance and interaction, on the other hand, make for a separate form of recognition. The question is whether other summit participants, but also observers, interact and engage with the EU.

3.1 Formal Recognition

The EU has always been welcome at every summit since the foundation of the G8 in 1975. The delay in actual participation was not so much due to objections by the non-EC G8 members, but was caused by internal disagreement amongst the EC Member States. When this bickering over EC representation was finally resolved, the Community was invited to the 1977 summit in London. The actual participation of the EC differed per subject, which was determined by the host and the other summit

³⁸ Both issues fall under mixed competence (meaning that the Community and the Member States share competence), but have developed differently within the context of the G8 summit. While the EU has shown considerable actorness in the issue of climate change, the opposite is the case for nuclear energy.

members. During the first few years, this meant complete exclusion from some of the discussions, as competence was unclear, and some G8 members, such as France, kept their reservations against Community participation. It was not until 1981 that the EC was officially called in at all discussions, including political meetings.³⁹

The question is whether the EU has become an actual member. However, it is hard to speak of 'members' since the G8 has no official treaty base. An EU official even notes: "How can we become a member of an organization that does not exist?"⁴⁰ It is undefined what 'Group of Eight' refers to exactly; some consider this to be a reference to eight nation states, and others to eight world leaders.⁴¹ According to the European Commission, the EU does not fit the profile of a 'nation state', which is why they participate without actually being mentioned in the name of the summit.⁴² Even among the G8 members, opinions differ on whether or not the EU can be considered a real 'member', a matter that is exemplified by the difference between the Canadian and German official websites on G8 affairs. While the Canadians refer to the EU as a fully-fledged member, the Germans explicitly do not.⁴³ Generally, it seems that nobody really knows whether they are a real member or not. An interesting discussion within the European Commission illustrates this: former G8 Policy Coordinator for the Commission, Morgan McSwiney and former European Commission Sherpa Stefano Sannino are convinced that the Commission is a member. Joost Korte, head of the Commission department dealing with G8 affairs, on the other hand does not wish to refer to the Commission as such.⁴⁴ Generally, those who are closely involved in G8 affairs seem to regard either the Commission or the EU as a member and therefore treat them as such. Another issue that arises is whether the Commission, the Council or the EU as a whole are considered a member. While some feel that only the Commission is a member and the EU as a whole is not,⁴⁵ others, such as the Russian delegation, also consider the EU to be a full member.⁴⁶ Despite these underlying disagreements, there seems to be little open debate on the issue. Since there are no rules to exclude the EU, and all members have recognized its relevance in the context of global governance, the Commission is officially granted complete *participation*, both politically and legally. Generally, the EU is not referred to as a member, but as 'representative', 'participant' or 'attendee'.⁴⁷

³⁹ Hainsworth 1990.

⁴⁰ J. Korte, Head of S.G.F.2, European Commission, interview, Brussels, 8 September 2008.

⁴¹ Government of Japan 2008; G8 Research Group 2005.

⁴² 'Europa', "FAQs: the G8 Summit in Japan from 7-9 July 2008", 2008.

⁴³ Government of Canada 2008; The Federal Government of Germany 2007.

⁴⁴ Interviews with M. McSwiney, former G8 Policy Coordinator, European Commission, Brussels, 4 September 2008; S. Sannino, former EU sherpa, former Italian sherpa, interview, Brussels, 14 October 2008; Korte, Brussels, 8 September 2008.

⁴⁵ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

⁴⁶ Member G8 delegation Russian Federation, interview, by email, 3 October 2008.

⁴⁷ Government of the United Kingdom 2005; Government of the Russian Federation 2006; Government of Japan 2008.

In no way does the access of the Commission to the summit differ from that of the other G8 members. They are always invited to all discussions, including the G8 leaders meetings. During the discussions, the Commission holds exactly the same rights as its G8 counterparts. It has the right to be heard on any subject on the agenda.⁴⁸ The Commission is involved in all preparatory meetings and is granted the same infrastructural means by the host as the other G8 members.⁴⁹ In case the Presidency of the European Council does not coincide with an G8 member, this EU member joins the delegation of the Commission at the summit of the state leaders. The non-G8 member is not invited to any other meeting than the G8 leaders summit.⁵⁰ In case the Presidency coincides with a G8 member, this delegation combines the position of individual country and Council President. The President of the Commission holds the position of diplomatic head of state during the summit, putting him at an equal level with his G8 companions. Actually, the G8 is one of the few events where he is treated as such.

The only element in which the participation in the summit formally differs from that of the other G8 members is the fact that the EU cannot host a summit. Although formal recognition is seemingly complete, this element of membership is essential, as even Commission G8 Policy Coordinator Alejandro Ulzurrun is willing to admit.⁵¹ He feels that hosting a summit would strengthen the perception of the EU as a full player within the G8. As the EU cannot host a summit, the tools available to the European delegations will not coincide with those of the other G8 members. The summit host plays a significant role in general mediation, but also holds the privilege of defining the agenda and inviting third parties. Nevertheless, the Commission does not formally try to enforce the matter, as it considers this to be "politically impossible".⁵²

3.2 *De facto Recognition*

In terms of the interaction and collaboration with other G8 participants it seems that, while the EU may not be a sovereign G8 member state, it is generally treated and regarded in the same respect. It has thus been stated that "we believe that the EU plays a significant role and is equal to other partners in all G8 activities".⁵³ And a member of a European G8 delegation notes: "I look at the Commission as a separate country almost; [...] it operates in that respect".⁵⁴ It has been recognised that the G8 discussions cannot take place in an effective manner without EU participation. Exactly because inviting the EU to the table is more about effectiveness than legitimacy, *de facto* recognition is considerable. The EU is not present as a courtesy or for ceremonial purposes: it is there because the G8 is devoted to tackling important global issues, on which the EU has considerable

⁴⁸ Interview with McSwiney, Brussels, 4 September 2008.

⁴⁹ Infrastructural means refer to delegation size, hotels, workspace etc.

⁵⁰ Interview with McSwiney.

⁵¹ Ulzurrun de Asanza y Munoz, A., G8 Policy Coordinator European Commission, interview, Brussels, 23 July 2008.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Interview with McSwiney.

⁵³ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation, by email, 3 October 2008.

⁵⁴ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

influence. Other G8 members therefore say: "The EU is there because of what it can contribute".⁵⁵ The issue of development aid, one of the key issues at recent summits, can be used to illustrate this matter. Since the Commission has an enormous budget for aid,⁵⁶ it would be highly ineffective to exclude it. Another example is climate change, also a focus of recent summits. In terms of norms, standards and legislations on this issue, the EU not only has considerable power over its Member States, but also globally.

In addition, it has been suggested that *de facto* recognition is complete, as the Commission does not only hold the same rights, but also the same responsibilities. The other G8 members and the NGOs expect the EU to comply with the commitments agreed on at the summits,⁵⁷ and the Commission has never used the 'we are not a real member, and therefore we do not need to comply'-card.⁵⁸ On issues of exclusive competence, such as trade, the EU is recognized not only as a full participant, but also the main spokesperson on behalf of the European countries. In trade policy, for example, the Commission is not only recognised through its legal competence but also due to its expert knowledge and technical expertise.⁵⁹

3.3 *Reading between the Lines*

Apart from formal recognition and *de facto* interaction, there are other aspects of EU participation that reveal something about recognition. These are symbolic elements, seemingly trivial, but significant in the G8 context. For example, EU aims to increase its public perception. The G8 is often regarded as a media operation. The summit is perceived an excellent opportunity for international exposure by G8 members.⁶⁰ To be present at the summit means that one belongs to the group of the most influential powers in the world. To be portrayed as such, can shape perceptions and these perceptions affect actorness. Therefore, towards third countries and their leaders, but also towards their own European citizens, it is important that the EU is portrayed as a fully-fledged player.

Regarding some symbolic aspects the EU does rather well. For instance, at official occasions, the EU flag is always present, like that of the other G8 countries. At the summit websites of the past five years, the EU is mentioned as equal to the other G8 members, avoiding the question of actual membership. However, the G8 keeps its name, thus excluding the EU from the 'number'. To all the other members besides the Commission, the issue of the summit name currently does not seem to be negotiable. While this has no real consequences for EU participation at the summit, it does have symbolic value.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, Berlin, 13 March 2009.

⁵⁶ Holland 2008: 352.

⁵⁷ The G8 Research Group has also held the EU delegation accountable by measuring its compliance.

⁵⁸ Interview with McSwiney.

⁵⁹ Sannino, interview, Brussels, 14 October 2008.

⁶⁰ Interview with Korte.

⁶¹ Interview with Ulzurrun, Brussels, 23 July 2008.

The European Commission is always invited to all summit events, including informal occasions. It has become customary to also invite spouses of the G8 leaders to the summit. Their attendance is usually limited to ceremonial events.⁶² During the past few summits, Maria Margarida Sousa Uva Barroso, wife of Jose Manuel Barroso, has always attended, something that cannot be said for all spouses of the G8 leaders. Thus it seems that some formal symbolic details bear testimony of equal participation of the Commission. In addition, hosts have been careful not to forget the EU, nor give it a specific separate status within the summit.

However, despite this portrayal of the Commission as a 'real member of the club', the media that are immensely important in terms of public perception often choose to miss this picture. Within the Commission press team frustration exists, for instance, about the fact that while the President of the European Commission is always invited to photo-sessions, some media still manage to edit him out of the pictures. And as G8 Policy Coordinator of the European Commission Ulzurrun also observes: "when you see these anti-globalization cartoons, we're not there either! They mock the G8 leaders, but forget the EU. That is really an indication of our role".⁶³

The way the media portray the EU says something about its recognition. However, it must be kept in mind that the EU is likely to receive less media attention due to the set-up of the summit.⁶⁴ Of course, the 'eight most powerful leaders of the world' make for a more attractive picture than the eight most powerful leaders, plus 'some other important people'. These eight world leaders are the familiar faces, the most direct link to their country. EU citizens still identify first and foremost with their national leaders, not with President Barroso, and the same applies to the media. And while the German and British delegations literally bring a plane load of journalists to cover the summit, the Commission has to limit their press delegation to a few people, since there is no 'Brussels story' as such.⁶⁵

The position of the EU within the G8 has also been neglected by academic authorities, such as the G8 Research Group. Only recently has the Group considered the EU in their analyses and it is still struggling with the issue. The unique nature of the EU compared to the other G8 members makes it challenging to conduct the same measurements on the performance of both the member countries and the EU.⁶⁶ Furthermore, while all other members have received considerable attention, the interest in EU participation has been very limited so far. It seems that even the G8 Research Group is puzzled by the presence of this regional organization in a 'country club'.

⁶² Interview with H. Dobson, University of Sheffield, by email, 14 August 2008.

⁶³ Interview with Ulzurrun.

⁶⁴ Interview with McSwiney.

⁶⁵ See also Bismans & Altides 2007 on the lack of media attention for the EU and the democratic consequences of this 'gap'.

⁶⁶ Interview with C. Vanderlinden, University of Toronto, by email, 9 August 2008; and Kokotsis 2008.

Generally, the formal recognition of the EU seems almost complete⁶⁷, and the other G8 members mostly interact with the EU delegation as they would with any other G8 member. However, when reading between the lines, full recognition remains ambiguous and somewhat contested.

4. Authority

When looking at the authority of the EU within the G8 summit, the focus is on internal dynamics. At first glance, authority mainly refers to legal competences – the extent to which the EU has the right to speak on behalf of the Member States on a given subject matter.⁶⁸ Authority also addresses the availability of certain legal instruments and the applicability of decision-making procedures. As is shown in this section though, a focus on legal matters might not fit the informal and flexible nature of the G8. Especially the case of mixed competence creates a fascinating picture, in which factors other than the legal mandate define the division of competences. This section indicates that the current system of competences within the EU leaves considerable flexibility and enables the EU to develop its role as an international actor, irrespective of whether or not it holds exclusive authority.

4.1 Competences and Actorness

Competences define the legal boundaries of the EU per issue area. They determine to a large extent the authority criterion of actorness. However, it has been suggested that EU actorness can still be significant without exclusive competence being present.⁶⁹ This may be the result of extensive agreement of the initial preferences of the Member States and the social interactions among them and between the Member States and third countries and non-state actors. Through this process, preferences converge over time.⁷⁰ From this it can be inferred that legal competences are not a main indicator of actorness.

EU actorness and mixed competences seem a fitting match: while actorness recognizes the hybrid and ambiguous nature of the EU, mixed competences are an excellent illustration of this nature. The system of competences within the European Union has been set-up in a way that leaves room for considerable flexibility. According to European law, a competence can formally be conferred to both the EU institutions and Member States, while in practice the EU takes the lead. The issue of environment is an example of a case in which competence is formally shared, but the EU is the primary actor. Thus, the way the EU legal system was set-up allows for

⁶⁷ Recognition of the Council Presidency is (even) more marginal, if not non-existent. If held by a G8 member, presence of the Council is hardly even considered and if held by an outsider, he or she receives very little *de facto* recognition by both outsiders and insiders. While this state leader will not be ignored and will be treated with the necessary respect, his or her presence is not considered vital (Interview with McSwiney).

⁶⁸ Vogler & Stephan 2007: 395.

⁶⁹ Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 971.

legal elements to be of less significance in certain contexts. When competence is shared or complementary, the legal and formal boundaries no longer exclusively determine how far the EU can go. This confirms the claim of Groenleer and Van Schaik that the EU can still be an international actor, even if it lacks exclusive competence.⁷¹ As such, analysing EU authority in the context of the G8 entails more than a look at the Treaties: the reality of the context determines to a great extent how much authority the EU actually enjoys. This logic suggests that authority in case of mixed competence depends to a great extent on the unique dynamic that is developed per subject.

4.2 *EU Authority within the G8*

It took the European Union a couple of years to agree on the legal principles of EU representation within the G8 summit. There was considerable disagreement as to what kind of EU representation was desirable within the summit. The question was whether distinct EU representation was needed, or whether Community powers could be delegated to the four present Member States. As the result of a compromise reached in 1977, the EC would be present to take part in those sessions at which issues of EC competences were to be discussed. This represented a pragmatic and parallel approach: the Commission was accepted as relevant, but in a complementary matter, never replacing the present Member States. A so-called 'pooling of sovereignties' would occur on those issues of Community competence, without a fixed or binding mandate.⁷² The compromise that was agreed upon in 1977 still applies, although the list of competences has expanded parallel to internal institutional and legal developments.

Up until today, the EU representation, both in terms of the Commission and the Council Presidency, remains without a legal mandate. According to the Commission, a mandate is not necessary, since no formal decision-making takes place at the summit and G8 agreements are mainly political and, additionally, very general.⁷³ The G8 aims to be creative and give direction. Compromise remains the principal goal and voting does not take place.⁷⁴ Since there is no legal mandate, there are also no voting procedures at the EU level. The Commission Sherpa reports to COREPER II twice a year: prior and after a summit. These meetings merely aim at informing the Council and the 23 EU members that are not involved in the summit process. While the representatives can ask questions, there is usually very little debate. The meetings are purely informative and take place merely as a courtesy.⁷⁵ As the EU representatives hold no mandate, and as there are no voting procedures, the legal instruments that are available to the Commission are limited to directives and opinions and recommendations, as derived from summit agreements.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Hainsworth 1990.

⁷³ Interview with Korte.

⁷⁴ Pentilla 2003.

⁷⁵ Interview with Ulzurrun.

With regards to the Council Presidency, there is no formal mandate or feedback system at all. The European Council representative usually works according to the agenda set-up by his/her government for the EU Presidency. However, it must be kept in mind that the exclusion from all preparatory meetings causes its role to be marginal. Considering this marginality, the authority or lack thereof of the Council Presidency is even less of an issue than that of the Commission.

4.3 *The Reality of a Lacking Mandate*

The fact that the Commission and the Council Presidency do not hold a fixed mandate within the G8 summit, does not mean that they have no right to speak. It just implies that any commitments made at the summit by the Commission or Council President are not binding. It also implies that the division of legal competences is not a significant factor within the G8 because, without a mandate, it legally does not really matter whether or not the EU holds competence in a certain issue area.⁷⁶ The reality is mainly political, as opposed to legal. There are no rules excluding the EU from specific debates. The Commission and Council Presidents have the right to speak on all issue, regardless of competences.

Nonetheless, the authority of the Commission will be most substantial in case of exclusive competence. For example, on trade issues the Member States “tend to defer to the Commission”.⁷⁷ In that case the individual states will still give input and push the agenda, but they will also recognize that they have less expertise than the Commission and cannot make any individual promises. In practice, this means that on trade the Commission is the primary spokesperson for all EU representatives (including the Member States) also at the G8.

Politically, the division of competences does have an impact on EU authority within the G8. It would simply not be deemed appropriate for the EU to speak on matters on which they hold no competence. While the Commission is technically allowed to contribute to the debate on, for example Iran, in reality it tends to keep quiet.⁷⁸ It has also been noted that in case of disagreement amongst European G8 members, the participation of the Commission becomes very delicate and formal, since, politically, choosing sides can be problematic for the Commission.⁷⁹ With regard to Commission participation on issues of limited competence it has been noted that “they have to test the mood a bit”.⁸⁰ Taking the example of the Georgia crisis during the summer of 2008, Commission President Barroso was sent to join the negotiations with Council President Nicolas Sarkozy, despite the fact that the Commission holds no competence on matters such as these. Thus, in case of limited or no competence, the Commission can still play a considerable role, depending on

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

⁷⁸ Interview with McSwiney.

⁷⁹ A. Dvorkovich, G8 Sherpa Russian Federation, interview, by email, 29 July 2008.

⁸⁰ Interview with McSwiney.

the political context and the degree of agreement that has been reached on the EU level.⁸¹

On issues of mixed competence, formally, both the Member States and the Commission are allowed to give input. On some issues this will actually be the case, while on others, either the Commission, the Council or the Member States take the lead. On climate change, the Commission and the Council constitute the main EU actors, but the Member States also participate actively. In case of nuclear energy on the other hand, the Commission cannot express a clear opinion since there is no cohesive EU agreement on the matter. If the Commission would express an explicit opinion, this would be considered inappropriate.⁸²

Generally, each topic will develop its own unique dynamic. Due to the flexibility of mixed competence issues, the EU can further develop its actorness, since it has the manoeuvring space within the summit to increase recognition, autonomy and cohesion regardless of whether or not it has the authority. This dynamic per subject depends only to a limited extent on legal competences, but also on national interests, the international context, the extent to which the European Member States have reached clear agreements on the matter as well as Commission experience, ability and whether or not it has proven its worth on a given issue in the past.⁸³ For example, on the issue of climate change the Commission has not been granted the authority to conduct international negotiations by the Council of Ministers.⁸⁴ The lead negotiator is therefore technically the Council President. However, since the EU has established far-reaching goals and targets and is *the* international broker on the subject, the Commission, as the main international representative of the EU at the summit, inevitably will play an important part. Legal competence on such matters will remain limited, but the political authority of the Commission is substantial, as its directives are deemed highly influential.

This situation may seem confusing, but lack of clarity concerning competences and authority has hardly ever caused conflict among G8 members, since the summit is not a decision-making body and focuses on the setting of directives.⁸⁵ Progress and compromise are the goals, and creative input from the Commission is always welcome, regardless of legal competences.⁸⁶

5. Autonomy

"Autonomy can be said to exist when decision-making latitude is wide, when agency slack is considerable, when decisions require going outside standard operating procedures, and when instructions are ambiguous, incomplete or depend

⁸¹ See also Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007.

⁸² Vanhecke 2007; Interview Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology, Berlin, 13 March 2009.

⁸³ cf. Rhinard & Kaeding 2006; Billiet 2006.

⁸⁴ Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007: 985.

⁸⁵ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation.

⁸⁶ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

on information that the principals cannot have."⁸⁷ Autonomy assesses the Commission's and Council Presidency's distinctiveness and independence, in relation to its members, institutions and third actors. While distinctiveness focuses on institutional distinction, independence assesses the extent to which these distinctive institutions make a difference. This presupposes discretionary goal formation, decision-making and implementation.

5.1 Distinctiveness

The Commission has its own distinctive institutional apparatus with an independent infrastructure. The Commission sends its President and his Head of Cabinet as sherpa. The three sous-sherpas – for financial, political and foreign affairs – all originate from the Commission, albeit from diverging DGs. The European Council is represented by the state leader of the country holding the Presidency at the time of the summit. When represented by a non-G8 member, the European Council is not invited to any of the preparatory meetings and therefore has no sherpas.

During the summit, the Commission delegation remains separate from the other (EU) G8 members. It has its own administration, expertise teams and media officers, conducts individual press conferences and distributes its own press statements. Hence, in none of the summit activities or preparations is the Commission delegation connected to or dependent on other (EU) G8 delegations.⁸⁸ In view of its truly distinct institutional resources, the Commission can really be regarded as the ninth member at the table, as also other G8 members agree.⁸⁹

The same cannot be concluded for the Presidency of the European Council. When the Presidency is in the hands of a non-G8 member, this country will join forces with the Commission. Its knowledge and experience is much less prominent and this makes it, to a considerable extent, dependent on the Commission.⁹⁰ Moreover, its limited participation in the summit process as a whole prevents it from participating fully and independently.

5.2 Independence

Independence goes beyond infrastructure and the institutional apparatus. Here, it is asked to what extent the EU acts with discretion from other actors in terms of objectives, decision-making and implementation.⁹¹ We argue that while some formal indicators suggest substantial independence, taking a closer look at the context casts doubts over a true independence of the EU in the G8 framework.

Formally, the Commission appears to be a rather 'independent' actor. This can, to some degree, be derived from the studies conducted by the G8 Research Group on performance and compliance. First, the G8 Research Group has

⁸⁷ Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 218.

⁸⁸ Interview with Ulzurrun.

⁸⁹ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

⁹⁰ Interview with McSwiney.

⁹¹ Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 218.

investigated summit performance of all G8 members, including the Commission over the past twelve years.⁹² Performance has been defined by the Group as the ability to successfully pursue one's priority objectives at a given summit and to steer the statements that emerge from the G8 to reflect one's goals.⁹³ The data in Table 1 suggests that Commission performance at recent summits has been comparable to that of the 'real' G8 members. This means that the Commission has been quite successful as an autonomous delegate. Not only has the Commission proven itself an effective summit participant, the figures also indicate that its performance is not correlated to that of the other EU Member States.

Table 1: Performance scores per summit since 2004

Actor	Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008 ⁹⁴
European Commission		0,77	n.a.	0,87	0,77	0,63
France		0,82	n.a.	0,75	0,82	0,48
United States		0,75	n.a.	0,77	0,72	0,75
United Kingdom		0,72	n.a.	0,77	0,82	0,87
Germany		0,82	n.a.	0,75	0,82	0,33
Japan		0,77	n.a.	0,77	0,82	0,80
Italy		0,75	n.a.	0,72	0,77	0,46
Canada		0,77	n.a.	0,87	0,82	0,70
Russia		0,62	n.a.	0,72	0,75	0,62

Source: C. Vanderlinden, G8 Research Group (www.g8.utoronto.ca/evaluations)

Another measurement that is used by the G8 Research Group is that of compliance rates. These refer to the extent to which a G8 member state has complied with the set targets of the previous summit.⁹⁵ In Figure 1 the average compliance scores, the combined compliance scores of the four EU members, and the scores of the Commission have been compared over four summits.⁹⁶ The graph not only shows that compliance scores of the Commission have been excellent over the years, but also that its compliance differs from that of the EU Member State average, which indicates at least a certain degree of Commission 'independence' in terms of policy implementation.

⁹² It should be emphasized that the use of this data is disputed since some critics feel that previous reportings were done poorly and rather arbitrarily (Interview with Vanderlinden, by email, 5 October 2008).

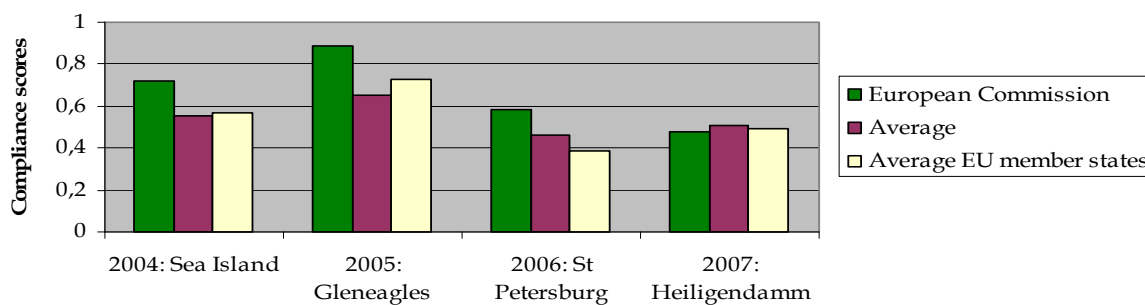
⁹³ Kwok et al 2008: 3.

⁹⁴ 2008 scores are not properly comparable to those of previous years since a slightly altered assessment method has been used (Kwok *et al.* 2008; Interview with Vanderlinden).

⁹⁵ Kokotsis 2008.

⁹⁶ The summit of 2008 has not been included, since these compliance scores have not been published yet. Also, the compliance scores of the Council delegate have not been included due to the fact that these are not measured.

Figure 1: Compliance Scores EU and G8 average



Source: G8 Research Group

Thus, the main assessments of the G8 Research Group give a positive image of a discretionary EU participation within the G8. This seems to come close to suggestions that “decision-making latitude is wide” and “agency slack is considerable”.⁹⁷ Certainly the way the EU representation is structured is conducive to substantial decision-making autonomy, as it clearly demarcates the Commission from influence of non-G8 EU members. The Commission merely informs COREPER II on G8 aims and results, without any voting or significant input by the EU Member States.

However, when taking a closer look at the context, a different picture emerges. First, we need to look at the question of who the Commission (actually) represents. This refers to the issue of how strict the demarcation in autonomy should be. Is it possible (or even desirable) for EU representation to be completely autonomous, when the EU is in fact a cooperation between several countries, among which four are G8 members? To some extent a formal division of European representation in the G8 took place in 1977. It was decided that the Commission President was to negotiate alongside the four largest Member States of the EC, without replacing them.⁹⁸ However, this ‘parallel approach’ left the question of who represented whom up in the air: neither a supranational approach with a legal mandate was adopted, nor a purely intergovernmental approach with the Member States as exclusive representative of the Union. This is a good illustration of the ambiguous international nature of the Commission.

The question arises as to whether this representation is a case of double representation.⁹⁹ The five EU participants function separately, while at the same time their interconnectedness cannot be denied, since the Commission often represents a position that has been established at intra-EU negotiations. The general opinion seems to be that the EU delegation represents the EU as a whole. However, some officials hold a different perception/opinion, including that when Barroso joins the table, he is first and foremost considered a representative of the Commission, without

⁹⁷ Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 218. That the G8 Research Group has analyzed neither the performance nor the compliance rates of the Council delegation is telling for its independence. It does not have sufficient autonomy to allow for such measurements.

⁹⁸ Hainsworth 1990.

⁹⁹ Pentilla 2003.

considering who the Commission in fact represents.¹⁰⁰ And a delegate of a European G8 member notes: "I don't think that the Commission can stand up there and say: we represent all the EU. To do that would mean that their view is also automatically the view of the UK, France, Germany and Italy, which is not always the case. I think the EU as such is not represented, only the European Commission is".¹⁰¹ Hence, some (perceived) ambiguity remains on the question of who the Commission represents. This ambiguity can, to some extent, be seen as a constructed one, as it has been formalized through the set-up of the current EU participation. Many issues such as that of representation remain unresolved, but none of the members seem willing to alter the current system.

When considering the Commission's *de facto* independence in practice, a less positive, more mixed picture emerges: although the Commission has developed into a mature participant in the G8, it tends to be bound by the politics of the (European) Council. The Commission and the EU in general can have a considerable influence on those G8 issues that the EU has reached unambiguous agreement on. On more controversial matters, the Commission would never speak independently. The Commission and the Council Presidency take many more viewpoints into account than the individual countries do. The Commission could, for example, never fully support the British position on development, as only a small percentage of EU Member States actually do so.¹⁰² These considerations give the EU delegations much less freedom to act and add to the formal attitude of the Commission delegation.

In addition, in practice the opinion of the Commission will never be completely contradictory to that of the other EU members and the Commission will not back a new proposal of, for example, the UK, before other EU members have done so. Division can take place among the ranks of the EU members, and the Commission will choose sides, but only after at least one other EU member has expressed its support for that side.¹⁰³ This means that the EU will not act unilaterally, but in most cases with the support of at least two Member States, while the individual Member States on the other hand, will not hesitate to do so. For example, at the summit of Hokkaido as on previous summits, France, individually and openly, advocated expansion of G8 membership.¹⁰⁴ The Commission could never advocate such a position completely alone. This connection with EU Member States, present at the summit or not, makes the Commission a conservative player on some issues. Moreover, since the Commission position, which usually cannot be regarded a cohesive actor,¹⁰⁵ is itself a result of compromise, it will hardly be expressing the most radical approaches.¹⁰⁶

A quick glance at the independence of the representation of the EU Presidency suggests that this is severely limited, due to the plain fact that the

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation.

¹⁰¹ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation.

¹⁰⁴ Kwok et al 2008: 26.

¹⁰⁵ e.g. Cram 1994.

¹⁰⁶ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

Presidency is always represented by a nation state. In many cases the Presidency is in the hands of a G8 member that is far too busy with its own interests to be highly concerned with EU interests as well.¹⁰⁷ When the Council Presidency is in the hands of a non-G8 country, the lack of experience and recognition forces the country to join ranks with the Commission representation.¹⁰⁸

Hence, while the Commission delegation has been carefully separated and granted complete formal distinction, and some formal indicators also signify substantial autonomy in theory, there are limits to the Commission's 'independence' in practice, since ultimately the Commission's freedom of action is subject to the control of principals, even though there remains ambiguity (also among practitioners) as to whether these constitute the EU-23 or the EU-27. Also, Commission discretion varies per issue. For example, on development aid the Commission has a substantial budget and on trade in goods it has exclusive competence and can therefore act more autonomously than on issues of lesser legal power.¹⁰⁹ In addition, Commission independence to some extent seems to depend on the cohesion achieved prior to G8 summits, an issue that will be dealt with in more detail below.

6. Cohesion

The final criterion is 'cohesion', which constitutes the greatest challenge for the EU, as its international potential depends on it to a considerable extent.¹¹⁰ Because the EU consists of as many as 27 states, sceptics view cohesion as the EU's pitfall. Cohesion is less bound by formalities and rules that, as elaborated above, hardly apply within the G8 context. Therefore, cohesion, more than the other criteria, reflects the unique dynamic of this specific case, focusing on political, as opposed to legal aspects. Four separate dimensions of cohesion have been identified: value cohesion, tactical cohesion, procedural cohesion and output cohesion.¹¹¹ Together they illuminate the degree of unity among EU representatives and the instruments that are used to achieve such unity. While value cohesion is extensive, the EU as a whole has limited means for dealing with possible disagreements within the G8 context. Again, the analysis reveals that the reality is ambiguous but that nonetheless it has not caused any significant problems so far.

6.1 Value Cohesion

Value cohesion entails the extent to which basic goals of the Commission and the Member States are similar or compatible.¹¹² Formally, there is no coordinated European position within the G8 to ensure that European delegations advocate the same goals. The G8 agenda is not explicitly discussed at European Council meetings,

¹⁰⁷ Interview with McSwiney; Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with McSwiney.

¹⁰⁹ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

¹¹⁰ Marsh & Mackenstein 2005: 253-254.

¹¹¹ Jupille & Caporaso 1998: 219.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 219.

nor do European delegations meet prior to the summit to establish a common EU stance.¹¹³ Nevertheless, nowadays, there are hardly any international issues left on which the EU has not established a common position already, which would suggest that there is automatically abundant cohesion between the goals of the EU Member States and those of the Commission and Council representatives. For the most part, this claim proves to be valid. As an official of a European G8 country states: "I think we are often on the same page as our Commission colleagues".¹¹⁴ On climate change, for example, a firm common EU line has been established, preventing the Member States from pursuing their own national climate policy.¹¹⁵ Accordingly, at the 2008 summit in Japan, the five European participants expressed the same targets and the same goals.¹¹⁶ Here, there was a rich, if not complete, degree of value cohesion. All EU participants are aware that such close cooperation can be beneficial to them: since it gives them considerable negotiating leverage, it helps to build momentum. The progress reached was largely due to this united European position.¹¹⁷

On issues on which no clear EU agreement has been established, such as nuclear energy, the goals can diverge: while France remains an active advocate of nuclear energy, Germany persists in its resistance towards this contested source of energy. The Commission may then act as a neutral mediator and cannot represent a European opinion. However, the G8 is not generally considered the most ambitious instrument of global governance, which implies that most issues have already been discussed (more substantially) at the EU level.¹¹⁸ Moreover, the G8 mainly focuses on global issues, and as a region, EU members often have common interests in these. This means that, generally, common goals are expressed, with the larger political themes as the exception. Even on political matters, the goals of the Member States are often quite similar or at least compatible. For instance, during the Georgia conflict in the summer of 2008, the EU was able to represent a common position and functioned as the leading negotiator.¹¹⁹

Within these common goals though, individual EU members will try to push their own interests in the G8 context as far as they can, while the Commission will function as a gentle reminder of the established EU line.¹²⁰ Overall, the extent of cohesion as measured in terms of expressing similar and compatible goals is generally considerably high. This cannot be ascribed to active coordination among EU Member States and the Commission in the G8, however, but to the fact that on most issues, these EU participants have already agreed within EU negotiations.

¹¹³ Interview with Ulzurrun.

¹¹⁴ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

¹¹⁵ Schreurs & Tiberghien 2007; Groenleer & Van Schaik 2007:985

¹¹⁶ Interview with Ulzurrun, Participant observation, 2008 Hokkaido Toyako summit, Japan.

¹¹⁷ Kwok et al 2008: 129, Interview with Ulzurrun.

¹¹⁸ Pentilla 2003; Interview with Korte.

¹¹⁹ Lungesco 2008.

¹²⁰ Interview with McSwiney; Interview with Korte.

6.2 Tactical and Procedural Cohesion

Now the question arises to what extent diverging goals are made to fit with one another, for example through issue linkage and side payments, prior to the summit. This tactical cohesion relates closely to procedural cohesion, which focuses specifically on whether there is consensus on dealing with conflict situations. While discord is inevitable and must therefore be accepted as such, the issue at hand here is whether the entire EU representation has agreed on rules and procedures concerning disagreements.

There is no formal policy among European delegations on how to deal with diverging goals in the G8. It is generally not considered problematic for each European member state to have its own favorite topic. Sarkozy and his 'crusade' for G8 expansion are illustrative here. While the EU representation remains neutral on the topic, France is free to pursue this goal individually. Since the EU participants do not specifically aim to present themselves as one cohesive unity at the summit, diverging goals are not necessarily an issue. Every Member State knows exactly what the EU line is, but is still free to express views that are not in accordance with the EU line. As one insider noted, "all the EU members, of course, respect EU agreements. At the same time, EU agreement has never been an obstacle to expressing views that differ from that agreement".¹²¹ The summit is informal and every participant can speak freely, without the constraints of legal matters or formal rules.¹²²

The former policy coordinator of the Commission, however, considers discord among the Member States the worst that can happen and feels that the Commission will therefore do everything in their power to prevent this.¹²³ In his view, lacking cohesion damages the perceptions of EU actorness. Behind the scenes, the Commission thus attempts to avoid conflict and disagreement not only at the main summit, but also during preparatory meetings. European sherpas meet each other on many occasions. They know each other quite well, and they know exactly where the bottlenecks are. Yet, all communication and coordination is very informal and rather *ad hoc*.¹²⁴

While individual EU Member States will not always neatly align according to EU objectives, on issues regarding which the EU has established a firm line in the past, they will try to achieve this since it simply gives the Europeans a firm majority position, which helps to build momentum. When this happens, the coordination role usually falls in the hands of the Commission.¹²⁵ There are no formal rules on this, but European delegations expect the Commission to coordinate and mediate the EU line on certain issues. As this process is completely informal, it can be used at the discretion of the Member States. In practice, this means that they will ask for coordination whenever it suits them and if it does not, there is very little the Commission can do to ensure cohesion. For instance, when the American sherpa

¹²¹ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation.

¹²² Interview with McSwiney.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Interview with Korte.

contacts the different EU members to meet concerning the contents of climate change during the upcoming summit, the European sherpas will contact the Commission and ask them to coordinate. The Commission will then arrange an informal gathering, establish an EU line and report back to the American sherpa. However, this differs per issue area: if the same happens for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Commission might try to take this position of coordinator as well. Yet, Member States have in the past resented this since they face their own difficulties living up to MDG standards. At that point, "the last thing they want is for the Commission to come breathing down their necks".¹²⁶

European G8 members have noted that diversity may even be desired within the G8 since the summit functions as a creative think-tank, giving impetus to new policy.¹²⁷ "Disagreement is allowed and not problematic",¹²⁸ as it is mostly a question of diverging ideas as opposed to real conflict. Non-EU G8 members do not expect the EU members to always express the same goals and ideas, something that is deemed ineffective for the G8 in its current attire.¹²⁹ This view takes the pressure off the EU Member States to always ensure cohesion. It is clear that regarding tactical and procedural cohesion, ambiguity is once more the case, as diversity and disagreements are allowed and even applauded in some cases, but simultaneously feared by the Commission. While lack of cohesion is not necessarily problematic for the G8, it does add to the confusion that exists on the role of the EU within the summit.

6.3 Outcome Cohesion

Outcome cohesion captures the effective unity that is portrayed by all European delegations at the G8 summit, regardless of conflict and disagreement. Thus, the EU as a whole can still be cohesive in its output, despite the fact that its representatives lack formal agreements to enforce such cohesion. Ultimately, output cohesion depends on whether or not the EU has already agreed fully on a given subject area. The subject of climate change at the 2008 summit of Hokkaido Toyako serves as an illustration. Some observers have noted that the progress that was made in the direction of EU goals was largely due to a common EU position. In this case, the Commission functioned as the main broker and with four countries backing it up, such cohesion made the EU a powerful and influential actor on climate change at the summit.¹³⁰ This occurred despite mixed competences and lacking formal rules on reaching such cohesion. However, where such prior EU agreement is absent, as on nuclear energy, output cohesion is very likely to be low. Output cohesion has also proven to be more difficult on politically more sensitive topics such as the MDG goals.

¹²⁶ Interview with Ulzurrun.

¹²⁷ Pentilla 2003.

¹²⁸ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

¹²⁹ Interview with Member G8 delegation Russian Federation.

¹³⁰ Interview with Ulzurrun.

EU G8 Member States do realize that in case they manage to ensure high output cohesion, their impact on the outcome is considerable. Yet, they do not wish for the institutionalisation of coordination, in order to ensure maximum flexibility and the freedom to act individually. If extensive output cohesion was the case, the risk of European block-forming would seem a likely possibility in the context of the G8. With sometimes as many as six European members at the table, one could imagine frustration among the other four non-EU participants. The reality is, however, that block-forming happens, yet not on all issues and not always according to EU lines. Most G8 members agree that too much European unity could lead to internal division within the G8: the Europeans versus the rest, which would prove to be extremely unproductive. As one G8 official states: "It would be unfortunate for the G8 if there was a united EU voice all the time, because then the Americans or the Japanese might say: 'we'll just speak to the Commission from now on'."¹³¹ This suggests that the current setting of EU representation within the G8 is the way it is, because it lacks cohesion. If cohesion was (more) complete, non-EU G8 members would never accept the current number of European participants. The fact that other G8 members are not complaining is telling: apparently cohesion is so limited that the US, Canada, Russia and Japan have no complaints about occasional EU block-forming.

7. Conclusions

The G8, in all its vagueness and informality, has proven to be a setting in which the ambiguous European Union participates significantly. However, while the European Commission, the President of the European Council and four EU Member States are all present at the summit, actorness of the EU as a whole remains questionable. The EU is present, and it contributes, but not on all issues. As such, it cannot be considered a member of the Group (yet).

Concerning recognition, even though the Commission and, to a lesser extent, the Council Presidency are fully accepted within the summit process, obscurity persists concerning the exact position of the EU within the summit. While treated as an equal by other G8 delegations, actual membership remains a disputed issue. Third parties such as the media, the public and academic analysts remain reluctant to accept the EU representation as equal to that of the other G8 members. Especially perceptions constructed and fortified by the 'media circus' should not be underestimated, as they tend to translate back to actual influence.

Theoretically, the authority of the EU, more specifically the Commission, is non-existent, since there is no mandate. But given the informal and non-binding nature of the summit, legal matters are of lesser importance in this context. Nonetheless, the reality is, to a certain extent, defined by legal boundaries as set out in the Treaties. In practice, the EU generally has most authority in areas of full competence, with the Commission acting as the main spokesperson for the EU. In cases of limited or non-

¹³¹ Interview, by telephone, 12 September 2008.

existing competences, the Commission President will stay in the background and must tread carefully, as too much input will not be considered appropriate. The case of mixed competences proves most flexible, as a unique dynamic may develop per case. Interestingly, the EU has developed its authority on two major G8 subjects of mixed competence: climate change and development aid. The EU's ever increasing authority on these subjects is mainly due to growing expertise and extension of EU agreements.

The Commission can be regarded completely autonomous with its own separate delegation. Formal indicators related to Commission performance and compliance also suggest substantial Commission independence. However, in practice its discretion is limited. For example, the Commission will not normally act alone, without the backing of European Member States. While the Commission meets the criteria of a 'distinctive' actor, it does (largely) not in terms of 'independence', i.e. discretionary goal formation and decision-making.

Finally, cohesion has proven to be the most ambiguous criterion and probably also the most limited one. Although cohesion, when it comes to goals, is inevitable on some issues due to extensive EU agreement, there are no formal mechanisms at all that tie the six separate EU participants together. Cohesion is desired and pursued when it suits the EU members, and if this is not the case, 'every delegation for itself' is the credo. EU actorness remains limited as long as this characteristic persists. Restricted cohesion remains an obstacle to the development of all other criteria. The formal distinction of the Commission delegation, the absence of a legal mandate and the discussion on actual EU membership all result from the fact that the EU still does not act as a cohesive unit at the summit. If the Member States, the Commission and the Council would speak with one voice, EU representation at the summit would have to change, in which case its recognition, authority and autonomy would alter as well. But since cohesion remains limited, the EU delegation remains parallel and therefore ambiguous.

The ambiguity of the G8 process has proven to be beneficial for the EU as it plays to its strengths. The EU has not clearly defined its international status yet, but the G8 might just be the perfect setting for it. The EU can participate fully, without being hampered by the fact that it is not a nation-state. Informal and flexible as the G8 is, it fits the hybrid nature of the EU. The informality of the G8 has left the issue of what exactly the EU as such is doing at the summit, for a large part untouched. The nature of the G8, a so-called 'country club', has made it possible for the EU to participate, but at the same time will always exclude this regional organization to a certain extent. The two institutions generally suit each other well: the EU can improve the effectiveness of the G8, while the G8 can enforce the international legitimacy of the EU¹³² and can also be seen as a forum in which the EU can work on its international actorness.

Providing an unequivocal general conclusion on actorness has proven to be problematic. Recognition, authority, autonomy and most of all cohesion differ

¹³² Hainsworth 1990.

considerably per context. Actorness of the EU within the G8 depends largely on the degree of EU agreement that has been reached on a certain subject, but also on the Commission's experience and expertise as well as the summit host. As for the latter, an EU host is likely to create a favourable setting for EU actorness, for instance, by attuning the G8 agenda to the EU agenda.

Whereas EU actorness with regard to the Commission seems far from complete, the role of the Council Presidency has certainly remained insignificant, whether represented by a G8 member or not. However, in the near future, new (non G8) EU members will be joining the meeting more regularly, and the role of the Council at the summit may thus change.

While the four criteria overlap to a certain degree, they may also contradict each other. 'Autonomy' appears to constitute the greatest weakness in Jupille and Caporaso's conceptualisation. One could wonder to what extent autonomy is an indicator of actorness, especially in case of parallel representation. As EU representation is complementary to that of individual Member States, autonomy does not necessarily indicate actorness. If autonomy were to be complete, the EU delegation would be completely distinct and discretionary from its Member States. Cohesion on the other hand, suggests close cooperation and compatibility between the goals of the EU delegations and the Member States. Cohesion therefore rules out complete autonomy, making the two criteria contradictory. An alteration in the criterion of autonomy could solve this problem. While keeping some aspects of autonomy (as defined by Jupille and Caporaso), namely distinctiveness, the problematic aspect of 'independence' could be replaced by 'proactivity', the ability of the EU to make a difference and play a leaders' role. Independence and proactivity would both be about 'making a difference'. However, proactivity would emphasise 'leadership' rather than 'discretionary goal formation and decision-making' and would thus be more compatible with cohesion. 'Independence' is very demanding and may not even be desirable within the EU context. 'Proactivity' could be a useful contribution to actorness, as it still captures the (potential) ability of the EU to be internationally significant.

The analysis of EU actorness in the G8 in this paper should be considered as a first step. Additional research is imperative. Future research should most of all take a closer look at the factors conditioning EU actorness. Our findings tentatively suggest that a number of factors could have some (causal) relevance and should be analysed more closely in terms of their impact on EU actorness in the G8 framework and beyond, including the degree of integration at EU level, the degree of politicisation and whether or not an EU member state is acting as host. Furthermore, an attempt could be made to investigate this case in light of the Principal-Agent approach, to understand more thoroughly the ambiguous relationship between the agents (the Commission and the Council Secretariat) and the principals (i.e. the Member States). Since it is not so clear whether all Member States (EU-27) or the EU-23, or perhaps on occasion even the EU-4, constitute the principles, this would be an interesting and intriguing research question.

Meanwhile, a second informal forum has recently increased its global importance. In light of the current international financial crises, the G20, a forum that brings together the finance ministers and central bank governors of important industrialized and developing countries, has been at the centre of attention. Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva even declared: "We are talking about the G20 because the G8 doesn't have any more reason to exist".¹³³ Within this forum, the European Union is represented by the Council Presidency and the European Central Bank, while the Commission is largely excluded.¹³⁴ Considering the current relevance of the G20 and the fact that the EU in this case really is the twentieth member of the G20, further research on the actorness of the Union within this forum would be a valuable contribution.

As for the G8, the role of the EU within the summit is likely to change within the near future. Largely subject to the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, new contours of the international representation of the Union have been established. Generally speaking, a single legal personality is to strengthen the negotiating power of the EU and make it a more visible international partner. With a permanent President of the Council, a potentially smaller part to play for the Commission, and possibly the need for another person to be invited, namely the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the EU representation at the summit is unlikely to remain as it currently is.¹³⁵ The Lisbon Treaty has attempted to clarify the international face of the Union and make it less equivocal. Only time will prove though whether the Treaty will indeed be the end of the constructed ambiguity of EU actorness within the G8.

¹³³ San Pedro 2008.

¹³⁴ European Commission 2009.

¹³⁵ Kurpas *et al.* 2007.

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