

FPC Briefing: The European Union and the Nobel Peace Prize: A Criteria-Based Assessment

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As 2012 comes to a close, the European Union (EU) has been admitted to the illustrious circle of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. On 10 December, the Presidents of the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament collected the Prize on behalf of the Union at the official ceremony in Oslo. While pure joy for Europe's highest representatives, the ceremony doubtlessly also came as a relief to the Nobel Committee, which had been the target of harsh criticism in the weeks that preceded the festivities in Oslo.

Pointing to violent street protests in Athens and Madrid and growing animosities among Eurozone members, European politicians of the far-left and the far-right had formed an unlikely alliance and accused the Nobel Committee of having lost touch with reality.² Commentators from leading European newspapers argued that at a time Europe is on the verge of breaking apart, perhaps widely recognised champions of European political integration, like Jacques Delors, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, or Helmut Kohl, might have made for more appropriate Nobel Peace Prize recipients.³ Eventually, a group of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates even questioned the EU's compatibility with the ideals of the Nobel Peace Prize more generally, claiming that in its relations with the outside world the EU promotes "security based on military force and waging wars rather than insisting on the need for an alternative approach".⁴

The Nobel Peace Prize Criteria

For the most part, the debate about the EU's worthiness of the Nobel Peace Prize has been characterised by a striking neglect of the fact that a clear-cut benchmark exists for determining the credibility of a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. Alfred Nobel's Will stipulates three rather narrow criteria, which the Nobel Committee needs to take into account when selecting the eventual Laureate from the list of Nobel Peace Prize nominees.⁵

First and foremost, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate needs to have a sound track record in promoting "fraternity between nations". Furthermore, the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize is supposed to have made a significant contribution to "the abolition or reduction of standing armies", a definition which is considered to also include military capabilities and infrastructure more generally. Finally, the Nobel Peace Prize Laureate is expected to be instrumental in "the holding and promotion of peace congresses", which in contemporary post-conflict diplomacy includes a wide variety of peace talk formats.

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² European Union's Nobel peace prize win greeted with joy and derision, *The Guardian*, October 12, 2012, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/oct/12/european-union-nobel-peace-prize-joy-derision>.

³ See, for example: Richtige Idee, falscher Preisträger [Right idea, wrong laureate], *Der Spiegel*, October 12, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/kommentar-friedensnobelpreis-besser-fuer-jacques-delors-statt-eu-a-860932.html>.

⁴ Tutu: EU Not Worthy to Win Nobel Peace Prize, *The Wall Street Journal*, November 30, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887323751104578151141536255474.html>.

⁵ The Nobel Committee, *Full Text of Alfred Nobel's Will*. Oslo: Nobel Media, n.d., http://www.nobelprize.org/alfred_nobel/will/will-full.html.

Judging on the basis of these three criteria, the EU may well constitute the most worthy Nobel Peace Prize Laureate the Nobel Committee has selected in years.

The EU and “Fraternity between Nations”

With the exception of some particularly ardent Eurosceptics, no one would seriously dispute the fact that – alongside the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation – the EU has been a prime facilitator of peace among its member states. The European integration process has been at the heart of Franco-German rapprochement. Since the end of the Cold War, the EU’s enlargement policy has played a pivotal role in the spread and consolidation of democratically governed market economies in Central and Eastern Europe. EU membership conditionality continues to be instrumental in the promotion of peace, stability, and economic prosperity in countries as diverse as Albania, Serbia, or Turkey. Indeed, of all the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates that have been selected over the last decade the EU is the only one that has a proven track record in fostering “fraternity among nations” in a narrow sense.

Looking more closely at the EU’s role in international affairs, one will find very little evidence to support the assertion that the Union⁶ is prone to promoting peace and security by military means. Rather, the EU’s foreign and security policy has always been based on a holistic approach, which puts a premium on soft security tools, such as development cooperation.⁷ Accordingly, in 2011, the EU as a whole accounted for half of all global aid, having donated a total of €53.1bn. The European Commission alone distributed €12.3bn of external aid, which made it the world’s second largest bilateral donor after the United States.

While the current animosities between creditor and debtor countries in the Eurozone may be reason to question the timing of the Nobel Committee’s decision, the Union’s historic achievements and its contemporary role in international affairs should be reason enough to appreciate the decision as such. Nevertheless, the EU must take blame for having failed to come up with sustainable solutions to what has become a persistently deepening European economic crisis with worrisome knock-on effects on social peace within and among EU member states. Yet, despite their partial responsibility, EU bureaucrats should not be the prime target of criticism. The failure of EU heads of state and government to present a common vision for the future of Europe and to provide strong leadership both at the national and at the European level have been the key reasons for the EU’s poor crisis management so far.

The EU and the “Abolition or Reduction of Standing Armies”

The EU has created an environment of mutual trust and a legal and institutional framework, which encourage member states to pool and share their military capabilities and thus to reduce these capabilities. Since its launch in 1999, the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy has fostered the emergence and expansion of a conglomerate of multinational force pooling projects, such as the EU Force, the European Rapid Operational Force, the Eurocorps, and the European Maritime Force.⁸ In addition, various EU member states pursue or are about to pursue defence cooperation on a bilateral basis. The UK and France are currently developing a Combined Joint Expeditionary Force, while a Franco-German Brigade has already been operational for more than two decades. The Nordic EU countries have launched a process, which is expected to result in the creation of a

⁶ It is a different story for some of its member states

⁷ Sven Biscop and Jan Joel Anderson (eds.), *The EU and the European Security Strategy: Forging a Global Europe*, London: Routledge, 2008.

⁸ For an up-to-date account of the EU’s own military capabilities, see: Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming.

common Battalion and the pooling of ground based air defence infrastructure, and the Baltic countries are aiming at integrating their naval capabilities.⁹

All of these projects clearly carry the promise of a medium to long-term reduction of Europe's overall military resources. In an era of austerity and tightening defence budgets, the integration of EU member states' military capabilities will become increasingly attractive. In this respect, it seems only logical that the European Defence Agency devotes considerable resources to identifying and implementing military pooling and sharing projects. The Treaty of Lisbon even encourages EU member states to explore modes of permanent structured cooperation of their militaries.¹⁰

Eventually, however, the EU can only play a facilitating role with regard to "the abolition or reduction of standing armies" in Europe. EU governments may have abolished key symbols of national sovereignty, such as national borders and currencies, but the integration of national defence structures is still considered a taboo in most European capitals. Diverging strategic visions and military traditions, the wish to maintain decision-making powers over questions of self-defence and military deployments abroad, and concerns that close defence cooperation may be seen as a free lunch by poorer EU member states are powerful obstacles to more ambitious forms of pooling and sharing military capabilities in Europe. In order to overcome these obstacles strong political leadership at the national level is required. A crucial lesson learned from existing EU-level and bilateral European defence cooperation projects is that ambitious military pooling and sharing ventures can only emerge and thrive at the initiative (and with the solid backing) of EU heads of state and government.

The EU and the "Holding and Promotion of Peace Congresses"

Of the three criteria stipulated in Alfred Nobel's will, the EU has doubtlessly displayed its weakest performance with regard to "the holding and promotion of peace congresses". At first sight, this may be rather surprising, since the Union seems predestined to perform strongly as an international peace broker. In contrast to its constituting member states, the EU as an actor in its own right has no historic baggage of "difficult" bilateral relations. Moreover, on the international stage, the EU has hitherto pursued a rather narrow economic, environmental, and human rights agenda, which has added to the Union's global image as a bipartisan actor.¹¹ Indeed, given the EU's geopolitical clean slate and its limited international interests, and adding Europe's image as a role model for peaceful inter-state cooperation, it is difficult not to conceive of the EU as an ideal intermediary in international conflicts.

However, the EU has not yet managed to capitalise on what might well be one of its greatest potential assets in international diplomacy. While Brussels has built an impressive network of Special Representatives who are tasked to contribute to the consolidation of peace, stability and the rule of law in some of the world's most troubled regions, including Afghanistan, the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, and Sudan, the EU has by and large remained a stranger to post-conflict diplomacy.¹² To

⁹ For a more extensive overview, see: Thomas Valasek, *Surviving Austerity: The Case for a New Approach to EU Military Collaboration*, London: Centre for European Reform, 2011, http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/rp_981-141.pdf.

¹⁰ Sven Biscop and Jo Coelmont, *Permanent Structured Cooperation in Defence: Building Effective European Armed Forces*, *Bruges Political Research Papers No. 15*, Bruges: College of Europe, 2010, http://www.coleurope.eu/sites/default/files/research-paper/wp15_biscop.pdf.

¹¹ Sonia Lucarelli and Ian Manners (eds.), *Values And Principles in European Union Foreign Policy*, London: Routledge, 2006.

¹² For a more thorough account of the role of the EU's Special Representatives, see: Giovanni Grevi, *Pioneering Foreign Policy: The EU Special Representatives*, *Chaillot Paper No. 106*, Paris: European Institute for Security Studies, 2007, <http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/cha106.pdf>.

date, the 2002-2006 negotiations over Iran's nuclear programme still constitute the only noteworthy EU performance in international crisis diplomacy.¹³ However, the visible role the EU was able to carve out for itself and for its then foreign policy chief, Javier Solana, has failed to translate into any tangible policy results.

While officials in Brussels deplore the EU's limited success in the field of post-conflict diplomacy, many European capitals still have severe difficulties with the idea of giving the centre stage to the EU when international crises arise and solutions are needed. Instead, member states continue to dominate the EU's external appearance in post-conflict diplomacy, often exploiting the EU to legitimise what are national rather than common European interests. A case in point is the 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia, when the then President of France, Nicolas Sarkozy, "hijacked" his country's EU Presidency to bolster his own political standing by promoting what was essentially a French blueprint for a ceasefire agreement and a framework for diplomatic negotiations. Much to the dislike of EU officials, Sarkozy's neglect of the need to consult the EU institutions and most other EU member states before his peace mission to Georgia hardly raised any eyebrows in EU capitals.

The Nobel Peace Prize as Encouragement for Political Visionaries

Evaluating the Nobel Committee's decision in light of the criteria stipulated in Alfred Nobel's will, it becomes clear that the EU deserves to be a member of the club of Nobel Peace Prize Laureates. In fact, of all the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates that have been selected over the last decade, the EU has by far the most successful track record in fostering "fraternity among nations". The EU has also created an environment of mutual trust and a legal and institutional framework, which encourage member states to reduce their military capabilities in the medium to long-term. Unfortunately, despite its formidable potential as an international peace broker, the EU has so far displayed a rather weak performance with regard to "the holding and promotion of peace congresses".

The latter finding in particular points to a more general problem: Strong political leadership at the level of EU heads of state and government is needed, if the Union wants to remain a guarantor of peace among and within its member states and fully exploit its potential to contribute to the reduction of military capabilities in Europe and the brokering of peace around the globe.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Europe is at a crossroads. The EU can either break apart or continue to prove itself worthy of the Nobel Peace Prize in the years to come. For the latter to come true, the Union will need the impetus of charismatic leaders who share the visionary imagination of previous champions of European political integration, such as Jacques Delors, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, or Helmut Kohl. Hopefully, the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize will come as incentive for such political visionaries to emerge.

December 2012

¹³ Mark Leonard, *Can EU Diplomacy Stop Iran's Nuclear Programme?*, London: Centre for European Reform, 2005, http://www.cer.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/wp645_dip_iran_nuclear-1494.pdf.