CHAPTER THREE

ARMA FERO, ERGO SUM? THE EUROPEAN UNION, NATO AND THE QUEST FOR ‘EUROPEAN IDENTITY’

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1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of a security and defense policy of the European Union, and the questions it raises for the relationship between the Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, have always been closely linked to the question of the ‘identity’ of the EU on the international stage. Already in the Single European Act of 1986, the Member States concluded “that closer co-operation on questions of European security would contribute in an essential way to the development of a European identity in external policy matters”.1 Subsequently, the Treaty on European Union, signed in Maastricht in 1992, stipulated as one of the objectives of the newly established Union “to assert its identity on the international scene”, which was to be achieved “in particular through the implementation of a common foreign and security policy including the progressive framing of a common defense policy, which might lead to a common defense”.2 In 2009, the preamble of the TEU as amended by the Lisbon Treaty continues to express the resolve of the Member States to implement a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including a Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), “thereby reinforcing the European identity”.3 Against this backdrop of evolving Treaty language, it seems that once the European Union as a polity starts to become active in the area of security, it reaches a new level of self-consciousness – a more palpable kind

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2 Art. 2(1) TEU (pre-Lisbon; emphases added). In the course of this chapter, references to the EU Treaties will be made in the following way: The Treaties, as amended by the Lisbon Treaty, in force as of 1 December 2009, will be designated as Treaty on European Union (TEU) and Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). For reasons of simplicity, references to the pre-Lisbon Treaties will be made in the form of the Treaties as amended by the Nice Treaty, and designated as the Treaty on European Union (TEU (pre-Lisbon)) and the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC).
3 Eleventh recital of the preamble, TEU (emphases added).
of international existence. To (ab)use René Descartes’ famous axiom, the underlying sentiment could be termed: The Union bears arms, therefore I am – arma fero, ergo sum.

This kind of soul-searching that preoccupied the Union as well as those who study it was warranted by the fact the European Union was a new initiative to take European integration beyond the allegedly ‘low politics’ of economic integration, and put it on a more ambitious, political track. According to Bretherton and Vogler, “the lack of access to military capabilities was central to discourses on EU identity either for those wishing to disparage or, indeed, to celebrate its pacifistic nature”. Consequently, once the Union equipped itself with such capabilities, old narratives such as Europe being a ‘civilian power’ were put in question. A vivid academic discussion was prompted subsequently about the nature of the EU as a global player, ranging from heralding the coming of an ‘ethical power’ to cautioning against the prospect of ‘militarizing’ a project that used to be inherently civilian and pacifistic.

These upheavals of course did not take place in a political, institutional or legal vacuum. By expanding its activities into these new areas, the Union came into contact with institutions that already occupied these fields. After all, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and in its shadow the Western European Union (WEU), had been charged with providing security to Western Europe for decades before the Maastricht Treaty was signed. Also in the transatlantic dimension of security and defense policy, the quest for a European identity was evident. This is well captured in the term devised for the ill-fated project for a European pillar

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7 See for an introduction to the concept e.g. Lisbeth Aggestam, ‘Introduction: Ethical Power Europe?’, (2008) 84 International Affairs, pp. 1–11.
8 See for a rather sceptical perspective e.g. Ian Manners, ‘Normative Power Europe Reconsidered: Beyond the Crossroads’, (2006) 13 Journal of European Public Policy, pp. 182–199. In addition, there were also voices doubting that the EU would manage to live up to these ambitions in the first place, see Robert Kagan, Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order, New York: Knopf 2003.