CHAPTER EIGHT

THE EU’S INTERNATIONAL IDENTITY:
THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE OECD

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ever since the promotion of effective multilateralism became a key objective of the European Union’s foreign policy, scholars have been increasingly studying the relationship between the EU and other international organizations (IÖs). Up until now, however, the relationship with the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has barely gained academic attention. This is extremely remarkable as the OECD covers a wide range of policy areas in which the EU upholds strong competences or has clear international leadership ambitions, e.g. trade, climate or development cooperation. Therefore, in order to fill this gap in literature, this chapter provides a first systematic overview of the EU’s identity in the OECD. In so doing, we build upon empirical data retrieved from interviews with EU and OECD officials, document analysis (OECD archives), and participatory observations.

This chapter begins with a brief description of the origins of the OECD (2.1), its mandate, structure and functioning (2.2) and membership (2.3). Then, we take a closer look at the EU’s identity in the OECD and demonstrate that it is better to refer to a multiplicity of Union identities rather than a single one. In order to explain this unusual situation, we develop a general framework (3.1) in which we unravel the EU’s identity into four dimensions. Next, we take a closer look at the Union’s day-to-day position in two important OECD Committees (3.2) – the Economic Development and Review Committee (EDRC) and the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) – and demonstrate that the Union’s identity in the OECD is an outcome of these two committees’ dynamics.

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Committee (DAC) – in order to put our framework to the test. Finally, we conclude with some general reflections on the EU’s international identities in the OECD and show that, despite this multiplicity, the EU holds a much stronger position in this Organization than in many other IOs.

2. The OECD in a Nutshell

2.1 History

The OECD is an intergovernmental organization that promotes global economic and social well-being. It was established in Paris in 1961, but its origins go back to 1948, as the OECD succeeded the earlier established Organization for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC). This European organization administered the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe, but by the end of the 1950s, its very existence was heavily criticized for two major reasons. On the one hand, the Marshall Plan had already evaporated by 1952, and by the end of that decade, all Western economies had recovered from the Second World War. On the other hand, the OEEC was also contested by two newly established organizations, the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which quickly became the new driving forces behind further European integration. As a result, the OEEC increasingly became an irrelevant player, counting its last days.2

The OEEC was nevertheless not truly abolished, as the organization was replaced by the OECD in 1961, after the signing of the Convention on 14 December 1960. The rationale behind this transformation was twofold. On the one hand, transatlantic relations in the late fifties were more problematic than ever before. Especially the relationship between the French president, Charles de Gaulle, and the US became increasingly tense on a number of NATO issues. Moreover, Western countries were divided on whether to follow a supranationalist (EEC) or intergovernmentalist (EFTA) path towards European integration. Therefore, the US wanted to establish a permanent forum for transatlantic cooperation, the OECD, in order to streamline Western relations.3 On the other hand the US, UK and other EFTA members were also frightened by the creation of the

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