



Supranational Diplomats

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0 Regional, international, and global organizations have established their
1 position as major vehicles for producing and implementing public and
2 club goods beyond the state. The proliferation of international organiza-
3 tions (IOs) as well as their increased scope has gone hand in hand with the AQ1
4 continued emergence of diplomatic actors located outside national govern-
5 ments and operating within supranational and international structures.¹ AQ2

6 While diplomatic relations are generally understood as conducted by
7 states, or more precisely by national governments—which set up diplo-
8 matic academies and curricula to train their diplomats before sending them

¹The terms international bureaucrats and supranational bureaucrats are used interchangeably here.

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9 to a posting, or formulate foreign policy from a ministry based in the
10 capital—the number of international bureaucrats who also take on diplo-
11 matic functions with third countries or other IOs has steadily increased. It
12 is thereby interesting to note that the number of IO temporary staff has
13 decreased, and national secondment is far less frequent than in the early
14 twentieth century. Today’s international bureaucrats often swear allegiance
15 to the international organization they are working for. They have developed
16 expertise that can be complementary or not with member states. All in all,
17 IO bureaucrats conduct diplomacy next to states and do not necessarily see
18 eye-to-eye with them.

19 Existing scholarship has shown that international bureaucrats, that is,
20 bureaucrats working for and representing an international organization,
21 play an active role in formulating and implementing multilateral policies not
22 only within the IO and its membership but also in relation to other coun-
23 tries, IOs, and NGOs (Haas 1958; Snidal and Thompson 2003; Hawkins
24 and Jacoby 2006). However, their independence from their member states
25 varies (Haftel and Thompson 2006), whether on the level of formal orga-
26 nizational structures or informal ones (Mérand et al. 2011). In addition,
27 no matter the formal or informal delegated authority, not all international
28 organizations have large bureaucracies.

29 This chapter presents major works dealing with supranational political
30 diplomatic actors and action. In order to get a better grasp of the dif-
31 ferent ways of understanding supranational diplomacy, we focus on four
32 approaches in international relations: neo-functionalism, principal-agent
33 approaches, diplomatic practices, and international authority. Most of this
34 work was initially developed and applied to developments in the European
35 Union (EU), and we draw from this organization for our empirical illustra-
36 tions. The EU’s External Action Service is arguably the most well-known
37 supranational diplomatic actor today although international bureaucrats
38 from organizations such as the UN, NATO, and many others have also
39 developed capacities that let them act outside member states’ constraints.
40 In other words, while the EU remains a prominent IO when looking for
41 supranational diplomacy, the different approaches outlined in this chapter
42 have been extended to different international organizations that operate
43 either on the regional or the global level.

NEO-FUNCTIONALISM AND INTEGRATION OF NATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Neo-functionalism (conceptualized by Ernst Haas in his 1958 book, *The Uniting of Europe*) is an evolution of functionalism, an approach initially proposed by David Mitrany. The latter thought that an increasingly extensive system of international organizations run by experts could be a transformative force within the international system, going beyond a competitive nationalist mind-set. Haas reformulated this technocratic and elitist vision into a more political approach, studying the multiple ways in which sub-national sectorial interests, continuously competing and cooperating, could be reconciled through the creative intervention of technocratic supranational actors.

Neo-functionalism is a difficult approach to classify because it borrows from theories of both international relations and comparative politics. Neo-functionalism recognizes the fundamental importance of the role played by states, notably when international organizations are created, or treaties renegotiated. However, it also stresses two categories of non-state actors that initiate processes for more integration:

- interest groups and transnational social movements that form at the regional level;
- organizations' international secretariats.

Nation-states set up the terms of the initial agreements and may try to monitor their developments, but are not the only ones influencing the direction and pace of change. On the contrary, international bureaucrats—in cooperation (or not) with actors whose interests and values push for solutions incorporated into concrete problems—have a natural tendency to exploit *spillover effects*, which arise when states consent to a degree of supranationalism to settle a specific problem, but then realize that solving the problem requires extending that supranationalism to other connected areas.

According to this approach, regional integration is necessarily a conflictual and sporadic process, made of give-and-take. But the approach deems that democratic and pluralist governments running complex societies will gradually find themselves subjected to economic, political, and social dynamics on a regional scale and will resolve their differences by

79 agreeing to delegate a certain number of competencies to supranational
 80 entities. Haas specified no temporal horizon for the empirical confirma-
 81 tion of his theory of increased integration, and a classic error consists in
 82 forgetting the conflictual aspect of the process he analyzes in favor of a tele-
 83 ological interpretation of a continuously ongoing integration. That error
 84 has led many studies to put forward the idea that neo-functionalism was
 85 “outdated” with each new difficulty in the process of European integra-
 86 tion.²

87 Several researchers have attempted to go beyond Haas’ empirical work
 88 (focused on the European Commission) by involving other actors in their
 89 analysis, and stepping outside an approach that could be seen as results-
 90 focused. In particular, Philippe Schmitter’s “neo-functional” approach
 91 (1970) represents the process not as a continuum with ups and downs (or
 92 even a multitude of continua) as Haas does, but rather as successive cycles
 93 involving phenomena of integration or simultaneous slackening depending
 94 on the domain. Similarly, Sandholtz and Stone Sweet (1998) have stressed
 95 the importance of interaction among private economic actors, legislators,
 96 and judges in the European integration dynamic. The integration process
 97 has its source in the development of transnational economic, political, and
 98 social exchanges, which makes it costly to maintain a mode of national gov-
 99 ernance. Consequently, non-governmental actors engaged in these trans-
 100 actions are pressuring governments, often with the support of community
 101 institutions—for instance by the increasing number of appeals before the
 102 Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)—with the aim of estab-
 103 lishing a mode of supranational governance where community institutions
 104 are capable of regulating a sector and constraining the behavior of the actors
 105 involved, including states. The emergence of these rules and organizations
 106 has led to the new development of transnational society. This approach has

²However, Haas himself recognized the limits of his approach. Studies from the 1970s, attempting to use neo-functionalism outside the European context, led to a highlighting of the European experience’s exceptional nature, notably by the fact that it included democratic countries with a high standard of living, and whose security was largely taken care of by the United States through a designated organization (NATO). Moreover, the European Union was ultimately caught up by a phenomenon that Haas had anticipated: its gradual politicization. European citizens began paying attention to how the European Union affected their lives, and politicians realized they could win or lose elections over issues dealt with on a regional level rather than at the level of their own state. That politicization challenged the illustrative neo-functional mechanism based largely on discrete cooperation among international bureaucrats, national delegates, and representatives of interest groups.

107 been criticized particularly for its excessive generalization, as it cannot be
 108 applied to all sectors, but it provides a vivid illustration of the increasing role
 109 played by certain international bureaucrats in favor of greater integration.

110 This being so, how can one explain the creation of the European External
 111 Action Service in relation to the neo-functional approach? The creation
 112 of the EEAS can be interpreted as a consequence of the spillover effect
 113 responding to the weaknesses of foreign policy and security cooperation as
 114 attested in the Balkans: The states had decided at the time of the Maastricht
 115 Treaty to endow the European Union with a “foreign policy and shared
 116 security” pillar (run by a “high representative”), but realized its difficult
 117 institutional position with respect to the European commissioner in charge
 118 of external relations and to the president of the Council of the EU and his
 119 “foreign affairs” lineup. The three posts were merged during the adoption
 120 of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the new post of “high representative” was
 121 endowed with a designated administrative service, the EEAS, thereby illus-
 122 trating the increasing integration dynamic. Thus, actors from the EEAS are
 123 always international experts, at the interface between states (since national
 124 diplomats are outposted there) and supranational organizations (hosting
 125 experts from the Council and the Commission).

126 PRINCIPAL-AGENT APPROACHES

127 Similar to neo-functional approaches, scholars working from a principal-
 128 agent perspective study how international bureaucrats (or “agents”) can
 129 increase their turf and push IO member states toward new policy domains
 130 or issue areas (Littoz-Monnet 2017).³ From the point of view of the state
 131 (or “principal”), this often involves agency slack. However, unlike neo-
 132 functionalism, this approach does not suppose an unequivocal teleological
 133 direction for integration and an increased supranationalization. Instead, it
 134 does not assume a priori that international bureaucrats necessarily work for
 135 the common good.

136 Researchers working in this tradition are more interested in understand-
 137 ing under what conditions states delegate authority to IO agents, and how
 138 agents translate their relative autonomy into actions not necessarily antic-
 139 ipated by their principal (Hawkins and Wade 2006; Pollack 2003; Niel-
 140 son and Tierney 2003). States can anticipate and try to monitor agents’

³The principal-agent approach was imported to IR from domestic politics studies.

141 attempts to mitigate their agents' pursuit of their own preferences. When
 142 states set up structures for an international organization, they try to control
 143 agents by putting in place various mechanisms: The most common
 144 are resource management, institutional oversight, or decision-making pro-
 145 cedures limiting the influence of bureaucrats. In these circumstances, we
 146 should not observe much supranational diplomatic capacity independent
 147 of member state preferences. But states can never control bureaucrats com-
 148 pletely. In short, the agents' *degree* of autonomy and the discretion that
 149 these agents take, as well as the monitoring devices that principals can create
 150 to gain back their power, are the main area of investigation.

151 In principal-agent approaches, international bureaucrats are understood
 152 to be strategic actors: their objectives include material security and increas-
 153 ing their turf, legitimacy, and promoting their preferred policies. Variations
 154 in the agents' ability to act are often explained by the varying staff size
 155 and resources at their disposal, the importance states accord an issue, and
 156 the capabilities that states invest in controlling their agents. While most
 157 principal-agent approaches suggest that international bureaucrats gradu-
 158 ally carve out their autonomous spaces over time, recently scholars such as
 159 Tana Johnson (2013) have suggested that even in the initial design stage
 160 of IOs, international bureaucrats contribute actively in the process.

161 This approach has been applied to a variety of international organiza-
 162 tions (regional and global) covering a broad range of policy domains and
 163 issue areas. The EU has received disproportional attention, in particular
 164 how agents such as the European Commission and the European Court of
 165 Justice behave unpredictably with regard to their principals. Most recently
 166 the EU's EEAS has emerged as a new agent in Brussels which is at the
 167 forefront, next to the European Commission, in fostering relations with
 168 outside actors. Using the tools provided by principal-agent approaches to
 169 study the creation and operation of the EEAS, we can analyze its structures
 170 and its degree of freedom. The EEAS is composed not only of staff from
 171 the Commission and the Council, but a third of its personnel is supplied
 172 by member states. The EEAS had a hard time establishing itself as an actor
 173 between the Commission and the Council, but has slowly created its own
 174 area of operations. Member states are still reticent about using the EEAS
 175 to negotiate major policy outlines. However, as shown by the discussions
 176 on relations between NATO and the EU, once the main parameters have
 177 been set up, it is the EEAS's job to implement the joint declaration by
 178 the two institutions, thus having at their disposal a degree of interpretative
 179 flexibility for the directives established by member states (Hofmann 2018).

DIPLOMATIC PRACTICES AND THE REGIONALIZATION OF DIPLOMACY

Increasing numbers of internationalists have taken an interest in the study of international “practices” over the past ten years, defined in the minimal sociological sense as socially meaningful patterns of behaviors. The origin of such practices is not to be found in individuals’ rational choices, nor in mechanisms above or outside the agents imposed by the social structure, rather these practices are the result of repeated interactions which themselves become constitutive of the social world. This approach to the study of diplomacy is directly influenced by sociological work, inspired by Bourdieusian praxeology, the “communities of practices” theorized by Lave and Wenger, actor network theories (associated in particular with the work of Bruno Latour) and pragmatic sociology as conceived by Boltanski.

In international relations, the work of Emmanuel Adler (2008), Vincent Pouliot (2016), Rebecca Adler-Nissen (2014), and Iver Neumann (2012) is particularly linked to the study of diplomatic practices. This approach also pertains to epistemological commitment, since the practices are not seen merely as a dependent variable resulting from causes to be elucidated. On the contrary, the practices themselves are constitutive of international order. This approach makes it possible to go beyond positivist and theoretical analyses of how the international system operates (such as the neorealist approach), which tend to see diplomats as cogs implementing structural dynamics over which they have no influence or which they generally do not perceive. On the contrary, through a practice-based approach, the emphasis can be put back on the practitioners themselves, their interactions and professional rituals generating the social orders that constitute international relations.

Diplomatic relations are governed by a set of rituals (of which “protocol” is only the formalized aspect) including in particular specific forms of eloquence, shared symbols understandable by all members of the diplomatic corps, gift exchanging and at times even particular dress codes. Multilateral diplomacy is no exception to these rules, and international organizations are the site of many ritualized diplomatic practices which are the *result* of preexisting social orders, but which *reinforce* or *contest* that social order once implemented by diplomats. Thus, in NATO, being seen as a “reliable ally” involves a certain number of very concrete practices which contribute to establishing an informal status hierarchy within the organization,

217 depending on whether or not they are successfully implemented by diplo-
218 mats from the countries concerned (Schmitt 2017). At the UN, being a
219 non-permanent member of the Security Council means those states join-
220 ing must commit to a certain number of favorably perceived public policies
221 (for instance, deploying troops on peacekeeping missions to show con-
222 certed engagement), but it also means the diplomats from those countries
223 must adopt a set of practices (when to talk during Council meetings, how
224 to comment on a resolution, whom to contact during preliminary meet-
225 ings, etc.) that signal their status. Naturally, the permanent members on the
226 Security Council also have their own diplomatic practices that signal (and
227 justify) their status at the symbolic summit of the United Nations social
228 space.

229 How to explain the emergence of the EEAS through a practices-inspired
230 approach? First, by observing, as Christian Lequesne has shown (2015),
231 that the creation of the service is the result of a compromise between rep-
232 resentatives of four institutions (the European Commission, the European
233 Parliament, the Secretariat General of the Council of the EU, and member
234 states) each having different professional practices and attaching different
235 meanings to the term “European diplomacy.”

236 Secondly, since the EEAS was created, the study of practices has helped in
237 observing the emergence (or not) of a shared professional culture within
238 the EEAS. In particular, two “groups” can still be observed within the
239 EEAS: on the one hand, the former members of the Commission or of the
240 Council, and on the other hand, the national diplomats, each harboring
241 suspicions about the other’s competence. Members of the former group
242 feel that national diplomats assigned to the EEAS do not understand how
243 the EU operates, and in particular the budgetary implications of public
244 policy proposals, tasks they do not deal with in their national ministries
245 but that are part of the professional skill of European bureaucrats. Mem-
246 bers of the latter group feel that members of the first group lack compe-
247 tence in writing effective and relevant reports on specific political situations
248 (a classic diplomatic task). The study of practices also makes it possible to
249 establish how diplomatic work is carried out in regional diplomacy, notably
250 tasks such as coordinating tools, sharing information within the EEAS and
251 strategic reflection on the tasks, and roles of European diplomacy. The study
252 of diplomatic practices thus helps us see how regional diplomacy is built,
253 through keen empirical analysis of the everyday elaboration of that diplo-
254 macy and the symbolic struggles that are the key issues for those designing
255 and implementing it.

INTERNATIONAL AUTHORITY

256

257 Recently, there have been some important developments in the study of the
 258 supranationalization of diplomacy following the creation and publication
 259 of new datasets on international authority. Pioneering conceptual work
 260 has been conducted by Haftel and Thompson (2006), who have shown
 261 that many studies assume that international bureaucrats possess some inde-
 262 pendence from member states but had not conceptualized, or measured,
 263 formal or informal institutional features to support a theory of degree of
 264 autonomy. This call to systematically study institutional design features has
 265 been picked up by several research collaborations. In particular, Liesbet
 266 Hooghe, Gary Marks, and their collaborators, as well as the team working
 267 with Michael Zürn have drawn attention to ways of measuring authority in
 268 international organizations. Hooghe, Marks, and their collaborators have
 269 focused on measuring the degree of delegation and pooling, and Zürn et al.
 270 (2012) similarly have examined the definition of rules, as well as monitor-
 271 ing, interpretation, and enforcement.

272 This empirically grounded work provides opportunities for theoretical
 273 and conceptual synthesis. Neo-functionalism and principal-agent models
 274 look at the mechanisms through which supranational actors can establish
 275 (more and more) discretion for themselves. Here, it is important to know
 276 the preferences of member states and international bureaucrats in terms
 277 of policy content and institutional design. As the preceding section has
 278 shown, the study of practices focuses on everyday politics in supranational
 279 diplomacy and how it shapes international politics at large. On the contrary,
 280 the work focusing on international authority highlights the powers and
 281 functions of international bureaucrats in absolute terms: The core analysis
 282 is not necessarily about the kind of diplomacy conducted by international
 283 bureaucrats (aligned with states or not), but on the kinds of resources they
 284 have to potentially carry out autonomous policies, as well as on their degree
 285 of independence.

286 According to Hooghe and Marks (2014), international authority must
 287 be understood and measured by two conceptually and empirically distinct
 288 aspects: delegation and pooling. Delegation occurs when states want to
 289 reduce the transactions costs tied to cooperation, and pooling is linked
 290 to the possibility for states to keep their veto power. Delegation mani-
 291 fests itself through the existence and capacity of international secretariats,
 292 while indicators for pooling look into whether states have given interna-
 293 tional bureaucrats more leeway by reducing their veto opportunities during

the decision-making and ratification stages. Via delegation, international bureaucrats can help states overcome issue cycling, sustain their commitments and provide information—in short, they reduce transaction costs.

Through these empirical measures, authors have analyzed how institutional design features enable or constrain international authority (Hooghe and Marks 2014), and how international authority can lead to IO scope expansion into unexpected fields (Haftel and Hofmann 2017). For their part, Zürn et al. (2012) have observed how high levels of authority go hand in hand with contestation, which is the expression of a high level of politicization. Thanks to this research agenda, largely driven by empirical questions, it is possible to show how the EEAS has and will develop over time, notably on issues of delegating authority and resource-sharing. Furthermore, this lens draws our attention to the potential of politicization that lies within the EEAS.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The various approaches presented in this chapter highlight different explanatory factors and variables and do not share the same epistemological grounds. However, they all examine how interactions between structures in international organizations, the role and strategies of international bureaucrats and state preferences have helped redefine the contours of multilateral diplomacy. Some approaches focus more on the role of everyday practices, others are more interested in “major decisions.” Some approaches highlight material factors, and others ideational ones. Thus, without minimizing the epistemological divergences, a degree of complementarity between approaches can be envisaged. Work inspired by the study of international authority (exploring institutional opportunities available to international bureaucrats) could be compatible for instance with research on diplomatic practices (studying how international bureaucrats use these institutional means in their daily work). The regionalization of supranational diplomacy is thus a major issue for both researchers and practitioners.

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