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EU External Representation in Conflict Resolution: When does the Presidency or the High Representative Speak for Europe?

Hylke Dijkstra, Maastricht University
E-Mail: h.dijkstra@maastrichtuniversity.nl

Abstract: Who speaks for Europe is a major question in European integration, yet few systematic attempts have been made to study when the Presidency or the High Representative represents the European Union. This article uses two most-similar cases of conflict resolution with significant EU involvement to argue that the size of the Presidency matters. Large member states have more diplomatic resources and political experience. They were therefore less inclined to rely on the High Representative and his/her staff. The High Representative, on the other hand, had greater difficulties to compete with large member states for media attention and for third party recognition.

Keywords: international relations, CFSP, security/external, political representation, political science

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Introduction

Who speaks for Europe is one of the major questions in European integration. Prior to the Treaty of Lisbon (2009), the European Union (EU) had two collective spokespersons for foreign policy: the rotating Presidency and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Yet, as is often the case with too many cooks in the kitchen, there was a considerable lack of clarity about the division of their labour. The Treaty provisions were limited, effectively leaving it to them to decide who did what. Since the Presidency rotated every six months, their relationship was continuously re-negotiated. The academic interest in the relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative is long-standing (e.g. Allen 1998; Bengtsson 2003; Crowe 2003), but few systematic attempts have been made to study *in which cases* the Presidency or the High Representative spoke for the EU.

This article analyses external representation in instances of conflict resolution where the EU played a significant role. Conflict resolution is defined by the European Commission as "actions undertaken over the short term to end violent conflict" (Duke and Ojanen 2006: 484) and is the most salient form of external representation. This article argues that the size of the Presidency mattered for its relations with the High Representative. Firstly, large member states have generally more political expertise and diplomatic resources. They are thus more capable of dealing with conflict resolution and are less risk averse than small member states, which may prefer to delegate tasks. Secondly, it was easier for the High Representative to

compete with small member states for media attention and audiences with third parties than with large member states. This article provides empirical evidence by comparing two most-similar cases of external representation during the wars between Israel and Lebanon (2006) and between Russia and Georgia (2008). In the first instance, under the Finnish Presidency, the High Representative was the key EU-level actor, while in the second instance the French Presidency spoke for Europe. Many other possible explanatory variables in the relationship between the Presidency and High Representative (e.g. salience, duration of the conflict, EU divisiveness and institutional rules) are excluded in the most-similar systems design.

These findings are relevant in at least three ways. Firstly, while various scholars have argued that smaller Presidencies tend to delegate more tasks (particularly to the Council Secretariat), they have all pointed to the lack of administrative capacity. Such conclusions can be extended to political expertise. Secondly, there is a common belief that the rotating Presidency particularly benefited the small member states, as it allowed them to punch above their weight in world affairs and it gave their national leaders plenty of photo opportunities that they otherwise would not have. Small member states, it was also argued, did not have enough weight to handle the responsibilities of the office. The large member states therefore convinced the European Convention (2003-2004) to abolish the rotating Presidency in favour of permanent structures. Yet this article shows the contrary: the French Presidency used its turn at the wheel for domestic exposure and the Finnish Presidency refrained from using its position for symbolic benefits. Thirdly, the case study on the Israeli-Lebanese war reveals that High Representative had significant discretion, despite an understanding in the literature that the High Representative assisted the Presidency.

This article starts with a discussion of the relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative from a theoretical perspective and explains the case selection process. It subsequently studies EU collective external representation during the Israeli-Lebanese and Russian-Georgian wars. While there were, of course, multiple European actors (including national leaders) active during these conflicts, this article is interested in *the most visible EU-level actor* – the Presidency or the High Representative.[1] This is the dichotomous dependent variable. Speaking for the EU is, in this respect, not defined in formal institutional terms. It is not about whether the Presidency or the High Representative was given an explicit mandate by the member states to represent the Union in a specific instance of conflict resolution. Instead, it is about whether the Presidency or the High Representative was, in practice, the most visible EU-level actor in an instance of conflict resolution.

1. Explaining who speaks for the EU

Europe has a plethora of external representatives. Among those that claim to speak for Europe are national leaders and their foreign ministers, the European Commissioner for External Relations and the Commission President, the six-monthly rotating Presidency and the High Representative. Only the latter two, however, formally represented the EU in matters of

foreign policy prior to the Treaty of Lisbon. There are different ways to conceptualise the relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative. The most obvious is through the lenses of the classical principal-agent model (Pollack 1997, 2003; Hawkins et al. 2006; Tallberg 2006). Article 18(1) of the Treaty on the European Union, after all, stipulated that "the Presidency shall represent the Union in matters coming within the common foreign and security policy", while article 18(3) stated that the Presidency "shall be assisted by the ... High Representative for the common foreign and security policy". This suggests a clear asymmetrical power relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative: the High Representative was an 'assistant' that did on a daily basis what the Presidency asked him/her to do. It can thus be logically inferred that the Presidency only delegated the task of representation in a particular instance of conflict resolution, if the benefits of delegation for the Presidency outweighed the costs.

Bureaucratic politics provides another way of looking at the Presidency/High Representative relations (Downs 1967; Allison 1971; Halperin 1974; Peters 1992; Christiansen 1997). This perspective suggests that when two or more actors occupy the same functional territory, they may compete for scarce resources, influence and visibility. Bureaucratic politics does not necessarily put all actors on par, but this theoretical argument does move beyond the power asymmetries of the Treaties. The High Representative is no longer seen as the agent of the Presidency and his/her actions no longer require a fiat. While it may seem counterintuitive to ignore the formal rules, Solana sometimes acted exactly this way. In an interview, he once stated that "I do whatever I want ... I pursue my own agenda. I don't have to check everything with everyone ... if you ask for permission, you would never do anything" (FT 2003).[2] The Presidency and the High Representative, from this perspective, were thus in a game of political competition to represent the EU. Needless to say, both models are extremes and reality is, as usual, positioned somewhere in the middle. Yet, for analytical purposes, it is useful to consider both extreme models.

1.1. The size of the rotating Presidency

Regardless of whether the relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative is best described by the principal-agent model or bureaucratic politics, the size of the rotating Presidency matters when analysing who spoke for the EU.[3] In the first model, the principal (the Presidency) only delegates the task of representing the EU in an instance of conflict resolution to its agent (the High Representative), if the benefits of delegation outweigh the costs. The initial observation is that such cases are rare. Being the external spokesperson of the EU generally paid off for the rotating Presidency. The benefits of external representation were twofold: firstly, it often led to significant media exposure, which was beneficial for national politicians. The six-monthly period in the chair gave them an aura of statesmanship (at least in the eyes of the domestic public). Secondly, external representation created opportunities for private gain. In its meetings with third parties, the Presidency often became party to privileged information, which it could use in the discussions with the other member states to shape outcomes to its own advantage (Tallberg 2006).

If external representation yields such advantages, why delegate? The answer is that the Presidency was naturally risk-averse and afraid of failures, which might have serious negative consequences for its reputation. While this counted, in principle, for all Presidencies, it was particularly the smaller member states that were wary of bold action on the international scene resulting from their *lack of political and diplomatic expertise*. Pre-cooked agreements that only needed to be sealed during a meeting with a head of government from a third country were excellent for the rotating Presidency. When there was actual uncertainty about the outcomes of a process and a need for the involvement of political actors in salient mediation efforts, national politicians of smaller member states with limited expertise might have preferred to delegate these tasks to the High Representative. This was not only to shift the potential blame, the High Representative was himself highly experienced and had a dedicated staff.

The argument that the Presidency delegated tasks, because of a lack of political expertise, fits in with the more extensive literature on the day-to-day relations between the Presidency and the Council Secretariat, the supporting bureaucracy of the High Representative. Most scholars have made the observation that smaller member states tend to rely more during their Presidency on the Council Secretariat than the larger member states (e.g. Christiansen 2002; Elgström 2003a; Nugent 2006; Christiansen and Vanhoonacker 2008). While this may have to do with better coordination mechanisms or preparation in the smaller administrations, the main reason is that they simply have too little administrative capacity to perform all the tasks of the Presidency. Obviously, there is a difference between the less glamorous bureaucratic work of drafting agendas and the political tasks of representation of the EU in international conflicts, but the general argument still holds: the Presidency could use the High Representative and the Council Secretariat following the Treaties and it delegated to them tasks with (possible) negative payoffs.

In the bureaucratic politics model, where the High Representative is an actor in his own right, the relative size of the rotating Presidency to the High Representative also clearly matters. The High Representative had little difficulty to compete with the foreign minister, or even the prime minister, from for example Slovenia for media attention. National politicians from France, Germany and the United Kingdom in the seat of the Presidency, on the other hand, were difficult to ignore. It is, in this respect, necessary to identify the resources of the High Representative *vis-à-vis* the Presidency. In the case of Solana, these were multiple. Firstly, his political expertise as a mediator in conflict resolution was unrivalled. Since 1992, he had been an actor on the international scene as Spanish foreign minister, the Secretary-General of NATO and the High Representative. Secondly, while member states may have been hesitant to support Solana, he was often recognized as the 'EU foreign policy chief' by third parties. Many countries preferred to talk to him and not to an unknown foreign minister that would be gone in several months (Crowe 2003). His network, reputation and continuity were thus in his favour. Thirdly, Solana developed a dedicated foreign policy staff, whose resources he could allocate rather freely to topics he deemed important (Dijkstra 2008, 2010). Fourthly, Solana

and the civil servants in the Council Secretariat had a worldly outlook and experience. Most national foreign ministries tend to have a more limited scope. Finally, and this is an advantage of the Presidency, the formal protocol did not favour the High Representative. Aside from the last point, Javier Solana thus had significant resources compared to many Presidencies. Many of these were, needless to say, related to his person and not to his function. For the model of bureaucratic politics, the occupant of the post of High Representative is thus important (see also conclusion).

Table 1. The relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative: size of the Presidency

Side of the continuum	*Treaty-based*	*Beyond the Treaties*
Sort of relationship	Hierarchy of power	Non-hierarchical relations
Formal model	Principal-agent model	Bureaucratic politics
Explanation	Cost-benefits for the Presidency: Delegation due to risk avoidance	The strongest actor represents the EU
Expected variance	Size: small Presidencies have less political expertise	Size: small Presidencies have less political resources

1.2. Case Selection: Most-similar design

While the size of the rotating Presidency is thus an important explanatory variable, it is clearly not the only one. For example, it seems likely that the Presidency stayed on top of the (domestic) *salient* dossiers with photo opportunities and that it left the preparatory work to the High Representative. It is furthermore likely that the High Representative had an advantage over the Presidency in *longer conflicts*, which spread over the terms of various Presidencies. The High Representative was then already informed, had a track record and was known by the third parties leading to path dependency (see e.g. Pierson 2004). The *internal divisiveness* within the EU also seemed to matter. If the member states agreed on a foreign policy dossier, there was less risk for the Presidency to get involved. If diplomatic and political manoeuvring was necessary within the EU, it may have wanted to leave such delicate tasks to the High Representative. Finally, it hardly needs to be mentioned that it mattered whether the relationship between the Presidency and the High Representative plays under the Nice Treaty or different *formal rules* (e.g. Lisbon Treaty).

With various explanations for when the High Representative or the Presidency spoke for the EU, it can be difficult to draw conclusions from a comparative case study analysis. Yet rather than opting for a large-n quantitative study – which has the drawback of not giving enough

context and thus negatively affecting the internal validity – this article uses a most-similar systems design, which strategically excludes other explanations (Lijphart 1971). In such design, Seawright and Gerring (2008: 304, original emphasis) note, "the chosen pair of cases is similar on all the measured independent variables, *except* the independent variable of interest". If the independent variable of interest (x_1) and the dependent variable (y) differ in both cases, it can be concluded that the independent variable of interest is *likely* of relevance when explaining the outcome. The explicit qualification is in place as few events in social science can be explained by one variable (King, Keohane and Verba 1994) and international relations does not allow for laboratory settings that completely control for *all* possible differences between cases (see also conclusion). Moreover, it by no means implies that other variables are not relevant. In order to determine their importance, further research is required.

The variable of interest in this article is the size of the Presidency. It is therefore necessary to select two cases with roughly the same salience level, duration, EU divisiveness, and institutional rules that took place under different Presidencies and had different outcomes in terms of representation. EU external representation during the Israeli-Lebanese war (2006) and the South Ossetia war (2008) fit these criteria. Both instances were very salient with substantial media coverage. Both took place during one Presidency and were short. With regard to the situation in the Middle-East and Russia, the EU member states were internally divided and both conflicts took place under the Nice Treaty. The difference was that in the first conflict Finland held the rotating Presidency, while during the second case it was France. The outcomes also differed: during the Lebanon war, the High Representative was the most visible EU-level actor, while in the South Ossetia war it was the French Presidency.

Table 2. Overview of independent and dependent variables in a most-similar case selection

Case study	*Israeli-Lebanese war (2006)*	*South Ossetia war (2008)*
x_1 *EU presidency*	Small country: Finland	Large country: France
x_2 *Salience*	Very high	Very high
x_3 *Duration*	Short	Short
x_4 *EU divisiveness*	Very high	Very high
x_5 *Institutional rules*	Nice Treaty	Nice Treaty
y Most visible EU-level actor	High Representative	Rotating Presidency

2. The Israeli-Lebanese War (2006)

The Israeli-Lebanese War was triggered when Hezbollah took two Israeli soldiers hostage and killed eight (12 July).[4] Israel reacted the next day with military action by bombing Beirut International Airport and by blocking access to its port. The reaction of the international community was as immediate as it was predictable: the French called Israel's actions "disproportionate" (Douste-Blazy 2008), the British stated that "Israel has every right to respond to inexcusable acts of provocation [but] it should do so in a way which does not escalate the situation" (Beckett and Solana 2008), and the United States vetoed a United Nations (UN) Security Council draft resolution calling for a cease fire. With the major powers digging trenches, there was a clear demand for mediation. The UN Secretary-General and the EU High Representative were particularly active in this respect. A spokesperson, for example, commented on Annan, "he really is on the phone personally ... with all players in the region" (UN News 2006). Solana himself stated that he had "spent practically all the night on the telephone with several important actors" (Beckett and Solana 2008; interview 2008).

The phone calls led Annan to send a team to the Middle-East under the leadership of his political advisor Vijay Nambiar (UN News 2006). While this mission was initially supported by the EU, Solana felt that given the deteriorating situation it was not enough. The United States furthermore continued to block progress in New York, which undermined the United Nations' mandate. Solana thus gathered his advisors on 14 July and decided to travel to Beirut himself (interview 2006). Two days later, he met with the Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora, whom he knew well personally. During the press conference Solana was asked what the purpose of his trip was and whether he would play a role in mediation. He ducked the question by answering "I am not going to tell you about any potential way of solving what you have mentioned. My visit today here is a visit of friendship, of solidarity and support" (Solana 2006a). Solana nonetheless importantly added that he was "the first person to arrive [in Lebanon] in the name of the International Community and which comes to show you our commitment" (ibid.). Solana did not have a formal mandate for his trip, but he was the first familiar face to visit the region.

Solana's role as a potential key actor in the conflict was strengthened by the fact that a regular meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) was scheduled for 17 July. Although Solana went to Lebanon to show his friendship with the Lebanese people, he was now briefing the foreign ministers on the situation on the ground. As a result of enduring divisiveness within the EU, the ministers only came to agree on an ambiguous statement. They recognized Israel's right to self-defence, while at the same time urging utmost restraint and noting that "it is urgent to stop violence and return to diplomacy [as] only a political process of negotiation can bring lasting peace to the region" (GAERC 2006a). The member states furthermore expressed their "full support for the High Representative's active engagement" (ibid.).

So far the Finnish Presidency had been relatively absent. While on 13 July it had issued a short statement stating that it was greatly concerned about the "disproportionate use of force by Israel" and urging "Hezbollah to release the captured Israeli soldiers" (Presidency 2006a), it left the initiative to others. Finland was also constrained by its limited diplomatic capabilities. It did not, for example, have an ambassador in Lebanon. While the German ambassador acted on its behalf (EU 2006a), the situation made it difficult for Finland to directly talk to the Lebanese government. The Finnish reflex was therefore to rely on the actions of the United Nations. On 18 July, the Finnish Foreign Minister Tuomioja met with the UN Secretary-General. The resulting press release clearly showed the Finnish preference for the work of the Secretary-General over the EU High Representative: "We give our full support to the efforts of Secretary General Kofi Annan ... to calm the situation and return to the peace process ... also EU's High Representative Javier Solana visited the region recently" (Presidency 2006b). Whether Finland was reluctant to support the High Representative due to the EU's internal divisiveness or whether it had its own problems with Solana, this statement was somewhat odd.

Whatever the support of Finland, Solana flew again to the region for a three-day visit (18-21 July) following the GAERC meeting. During this trip he met with various actors (EU 2006a). He was also less ambiguous than a couple of days earlier during his visit to Lebanon. At a joint press point with the Israeli Foreign Minister, he stated that he had "the aim of trying to cooperate to see if the situation in the Middle East today can be stopped" (Solana 2006b). Solana's position was, in this respect, also strengthened by a letter of the French President Chirac to the Finnish Presidency calling for a leading role of Solana in brokering a ceasefire on behalf of the EU (20 July; interview 2008). The Presidency ignored the letter by replying, only on 25 July, that it "fully supports the work of the High Representative, Javier Solana, who is acting on the EU's behalf" (Presidency 2006c). While a French diplomat in the EUObserver (2006a, b) ironically noted that Solana now at least had a mandate to go to the region, the United Kingdom was reportedly unwilling to make Solana the formal EU representative given the lack of consensus within the EU on how to handle this crisis. France got the message and started to take the initiative in its own hands (see below).

Shortly after Solana's trip, the situation escalated when Israeli ground troops entered Lebanon following continuous rocket attacks by Hezbollah (22 July). At the same time Israel made it clear that it could accept a NATO-led multinational force guarding the border with Lebanon and with a mandate to disarm Hezbollah (23 July). This suggestion took many at NATO headquarters by surprise – they had expected an increased role for the United Nations instead – but it was welcomed by the United States. Its UN ambassador, however, made clear immediately that US troops were unlikely to get involved (IHT 2006a). France and Germany on the other hand, whose foreign ministers were visiting the region, expressed their reluctance to a NATO mission (ibid.). At the same time, United States Secretary Condoleezza Rice travelled to the Middle-East for the first time since the start of the conflict with stops in Beirut, Jerusalem and Ramallah (24-25 July). While this raised the prospects of a changing American position, Rice warned in advance of her trip that there were "no quick fixes" and

that the United States would still not support an early ceasefire (FT 2006a). She did become seriously involved in mediation (Hamel and Issacharoff 2008).

The first multilateral conference on the Israeli-Lebanese war took place in Rome (26 July) with representatives of many of the involved countries and international organisations. The EU was represented by the Troika consisting of the Finnish Foreign Minister, the High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations. While this conference was more successful in dealing with the humanitarian situation in Lebanon, possible ways out of the conflict were also discussed. Solana, for example, made clear that the EU member states would have to make up the bulk of a possible international peacekeeping force, whether it is under UN flag or a UN-mandated EU mission (FT 2006b). President Chirac similarly stressed the European role, by pointing out that "NATO is perceived, whether we like it or not, as the armed wing of the West in these regions and consequently in terms of its image, NATO is not the right organization here" (NYT 2006a). Yet any discussion on a peace force was premature given the American reluctance to accept "temporary solutions", such as an immediate cease-fire (FT 2006c). The conference could only agree on an ambiguous "determination to work immediately to reach with the utmost urgency a cease-fire that puts an end to the current violence and hostilities" (co-chairmen statement 2006).

After the conference, the Finnish Presidency and the Commissioner for External Relations also went on a joint trip to the Middle-East (27/28 July) with one diplomat noting that "clearly the presidency wants to be involved as well" (EUObserver 2006a). Yet the belated visit brought little new progress with Lebanese and Israeli diplomats allegedly grumbling about "having to host a plethora of EU entities" (EUObserver 2006b). Prime Minister Siniora furthermore initiated a modest seven point peace plan (27 July), which accepted an increased UN presence on Lebanese soil. This plan was quickly endorsed by all the major actors, except Israel and the United States. After the conference, however, the situation on the ground started to change. Based on the conference conclusions, Israel stated that it now had the "green light" to continue its attacks on Lebanon, which went down badly with the EU member states (IHT 2006b). In addition, Israel made two strategic mistakes by attacking a UN observer post and killing four people (27 July) and by bombing an apartment block in Qana during an air strike killing tens of Lebanese civilians (30 July). The United States pressed Israel to accept a 48-hours suspension of air raids (NYT 2006b). Rice furthermore instructed the US Representative to the United Nations to get a Security Council resolution (Harel and Issacharoff 2008). President Chirac sent directly his foreign minister Philippe Douste-Blazy to the region for the purpose of mediation (30 July) (NYT 2006c). These American and French initiatives eventually led to their jointly brokered peace agreement (see also below).

On 1 August, the EU member states met in an extraordinary General Affairs and External Relations Council to discuss the situation in Lebanon. While they asked the High Representative "to remain engaged and to remain in contact with all the relevant parties" (GAERC 2006b), the initiative was now clearly with France and the United States. Within the UN Security Council there were two opposing views. The perspective championed by France

was that a cease-fire was necessary before any (French) peacekeeping troops could be deployed under a stronger UN mandate. The United States' argument, on the other hand, was that it only makes sense to agree to a complete deal and that 15,000-20,000 peacekeepers should arrive before a cease-fire could be agreed, because a cease-fire alone was unlikely to hold. The extra time, which it would take to arrange such matters, also gave Israel the opportunity to 'finish business' and claim victory (NYT 2006d). The United States eventually gave in, following the Qana bombing, and a draft Security Council resolution was tabled by France and the United States on 5 August.

The text of this resolution (in Makdisi et al. 2009) called for a truce and suggested a second resolution in two or three weeks time, which would establish a final cease-fire and a political settlement. The monitoring of the truce would be in the hands of the current 2,000-strong UN mission in Lebanon. The draft resolution did not include a prisoner exchange nor did it require Israel to withdraw its troops from Lebanon (NYT 2006e). Moreover, the draft Security Council resolution expressed the intention to authorize a Chapter VII peacekeeping mission with robust enforcement powers. This was a problem for Lebanon, which criticized, opposed and finally rejected the draft resolution (FT 2006d; Picard 2006). However, as a counter offer, the Lebanese government suggested that it would deploy 15,000 of its own troops to Southern Lebanon to cover the period between Israeli withdrawal and the arrival of UN reinforcements (7 August) (NYT 2006f). This offer was initially dismissed by Israel, but Prime Minister Olmert quickly called it an "interesting step", after France, but also the United States, stated that it was an "important contribution" (IHT 2006c). Despite some continuous negotiations at the United Nations, this idea eventually became the basis of Security Council Resolution 1701, which finally ended hostilities (11 August).

Directly after the deal was agreed, Solana flew to the Middle-East in order to ensure the support of the regional parties for the resolution and to guarantee them that the international community would deploy a peacekeeping force "very, very quickly" (FT 2006e). Solana furthermore played an important role in making sure that the EU member states indeed delivered a substantial number of troops to the UNIFIL peacekeeping operation. This was essential, as France initially declined to play a major role in the mission by making only 200 soldiers available. Given its leadership role during the negotiations, this was seen as a major setback for the United Nations (IHT 2006d).[5] Germany and the United Kingdom furthermore conveniently used their historical and Iraq/Afghanistan cards to avoid getting involved. Italy in the end stepped in with 3,000 troops and the willingness to take on the role of command. This was followed by contributions of other member states. Important, in this respect, was the political pressure of Solana and Annan during a second extraordinary GAERC (25 August).

In the case of Lebanon, Solana was thus not the most important European actor; that role goes to France (see further Picard 2006). Yet when it came to collective representation, it was Solana rather than the Finnish Presidency, who spoke for the EU. Their relationship was not harmonious. The Finnish Presidency, after all, declined an increased mandate for the High Representative. The fact that Solana did not have the full backing of the Presidency and the

member states probably undermined his ability to really play the role of mediator. That having been said, Solana was particularly present. He knew the regional players involved and they accepted him as the EU voice. He was also the first politician of the international community to visit the region. This gave him the possibility to brief the EU foreign ministers. The Finnish Presidency lacked the political and diplomatic expertise to play a significant role in representation. It did not have diplomatic stature, neither on the ground nor in New York. It did not have the networks and contacts and was somewhat overwhelmed by the events. Moreover, it resented Solana taking on a major role.

3. The South Ossetia War (2008)

The war between Georgia and Russia was not a complete surprise.[6] South Ossetia had been one of the frozen conflicts since the fall of the Soviet Union and Georgia's bilateral relationship with Russia had become notoriously difficult after Saakashvili replaced Shevardnadze as president during the Rose Revolution (2003). Georgia was, against Russian preferences, on its way to NATO membership and the United States together with many EU member states had recognized the unilateral declaration of independence in Kosovo. Such independence, Russia had long argued, would set a precedent for other regions, including South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In the spring of 2008 the situation went from bad to worse, with small conflicts taking place in both breakaway regions and Russia increasing the number of its peacekeepers in both regions to protect the local population against possible Georgian aggression (interview 2009). NATO furthermore held joint exercises with Georgian troops and the Russian army trained just across the northern border. In the beginning of August clashes between the Georgian army and the separatists intensified and, on 7 August, the Georgian army entered South Ossetia.

The Russian response was immediate. It conducted airstrikes on Georgian targets and moved heavy military units – previously conveniently participating in the above-mentioned exercise – into South Ossetia to support its peacekeepers (8 August) (NYT 2008a). The national leaders from the United States and EU member states, most of who were being entertained by their Chinese host at the Beijing Olympics, called for an immediate cease-fire. The Russian Prime Minister Putin, however, stated that “war [had] started” (ibid.). The military might of Russia was no match for the Georgian troops, particularly after Russia opened a second front from Abkhazia (9 August). The Georgian army had no choice but to withdraw from South Ossetia (10 August) in order to defend what can be described Georgia proper, including its capital Tbilisi. This seemed to become the next Russian target (FT 2008a). Russia indeed continued its march south ignoring statements from the international community (NYT 2008b). In a reaction to these military movements, the outgoing US President Bush made a surprisingly strong statement stating that “Russia has invaded a sovereign neighbouring state and threatens a democratic government elected by its people. Such an action is unacceptable in the 21st century” (11 August) (FT 2008b).

The EU's message was, again due to its divisiveness, belated. While Poland and the Baltic states urged the European Council to meet in an emergency session, Germany and Italy stated that this would implicitly imply a condemnation of Russia, while it was Georgia that had started the war (FT 2008c). The French Presidency nonetheless took the initiative. After contacts with the two combatant parties as well as EU colleagues, it drafted a proposal, which included a cease-fire agreement and a re-establishment of the *status quo* before the conflict. A spokesperson of the French Presidency noted that its role was to "ensure the 27 members have the most unified position ... [and] to make the Russians understand that if the conflict continues there will be consequences". Yet in reality, the Presidency turned the order the other way around (ibid.; Asmus 2010). On 12 August, President Sarkozy left for Moscow on his own to discuss a cease-fire proposal with Russian President Medvedev, while Foreign Minister Kouchner only gathered his counterparts on 13 August in an extraordinary General Affairs and External Relations Council – not to coordinate a position, but to brief them on the eventual Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement (ibid.).

The success of President Sarkozy's trip was mixed. While the Russians did agree to his four points – no more use of force; cessation of hostilities; free access to humanitarian aid; and Georgian and Russian troops withdraw to their pre-war positions – they added two further. The sixth point was, in the short-term at least, rather uncontroversial calling for an international discussion on the long-term security of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The fifth point would give Russia the right to keep peacekeeping forces in place (not specifying whether this included Georgia proper) until international monitors would arrive (NYT 2008c). The similarities with the Lebanese case were obvious – who fills the security vacuum until the deployment of the international presence – as were the sensitivities. After reaching agreement with Russia, Sarkozy travelled directly to Georgia to discuss the matters with President Saakashvili. Georgia was clearly not happy with the ambiguity in the fifth point and asked for a clear timeline. When Sarkozy tried to call the Russian President he was put on hold for nearly two hours, after which the Russians simply rejected the offer. This left the Georgians with a take-or-leave-it and Sarkozy allegedly put pressure on the Georgians by stating that "their tanks are 40 kilometers from Tbilisi. This is where we are" (ibid.). The Georgian President agreed at 2 a.m. to the six point action plan.

The problems with the peace plan became directly apparent when Russian army continued to advance, looted the country-side and its tanks took up strategic positions around the Georgian city Gori (13 August). Russia claimed this was justified under point five (NYT 2008d). These developments re-emphasized the need for a quick presence of the international community on the ground. After having listened to a briefing of the French Presidency on the details of the Sarkozy-Medvedev agreement, it is thus no surprise that the General Affairs and External Relations Council discussed various arrangements to monitor the cease-fire agreement (13 August). This included, first and foremost, a strengthening of the existing OSCE monitor mission. Yet, following pressure from the French Presidency, the Council stated that it "considers that the European Union must be prepared to commit itself, including on the ground, to support every effort ... with a view to a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict

in Georgia" (GAERC 2008; NYT 2008e). The High Representative was tasked to investigate the options and to report back to the ministers during their next Council meeting in September.

In the days after the cease-fire agreement, it became increasingly clear that Russian troops were not withdrawing from Georgia proper. This again led to a storm of protest by Western leaders. Condoleezza Rice stated on 17 August that "the Russian president said several days ago Russian military operations would stop. They didn't". Sarkozy noted that Russia in its relationship with the EU would suffer "serious consequences", if its compliance with the agreement was not "rapid and complete". The German Chancellor Angela Merkel warned that "this process should not drag out for weeks" (NYT 2008f). And yet it did. The Russian army stayed where it was and continued to ignore comments by the international community. On 22 August, Russia began to withdraw its troops from a few places, but it strengthened its buffer zones along the South Ossetia border within Georgia proper (FT 2008d). In response, President Sarkozy called for an emergency European Council to be held on 1 September (24 August). This meeting would have two objectives: to put extra pressure on Russia and to discuss how the EU could contribute to a solution by making available European monitors (NYT 2008g).

Before the European Heads of State and Government had the opportunity to meet, Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (26 August). This surprise move was directly condemned by the United States and the EU, with the French foreign minister Kouchner noting that "sanctions are being considered, and many other means as well" (FT 2008e; IHT 2008). While the recognition of the two breakaway regions brought the EU member states closer together, the basic underlying divisiveness was not gone. The European Council therefore did not decide upon any direct punitive actions against Russia. It did reach agreement on sending a fact-finding mission to the region as a first step towards a possible monitoring presence in the context of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). The European Council furthermore decided to send President Sarkozy, together with the Commission President and Solana, to Moscow in order to "to continue discussions [with Russia] with a view to the full application of the six-point agreement". A little stick was attached to this Troika visit, because "until [Russian] troops have withdrawn to the positions held prior to 7 August, meetings on the negotiation of the Partnership Agreement [between the EU and Russia] will be postponed" (European Council 2008, article 11).

The fact that President Sarkozy was now accompanied by Barroso and Solana made sense in functional terms. The European Commission would, after all, play a major role in the negotiations of the Partnership Agreement and the office of Solana was already planning a possible EU-led monitoring mission. In a divided EU, it was also a control mechanism for some member states to avoid a situation that Sarkozy could again use for private gain. Yet the fact that a French President, and particularly the current office-holder, does not like to be put on par with the Commission President or even the High Representative became very clear during the joint visit (interview 2009). In Moscow, President Sarkozy had a personal meeting

with President Medvedev. Barroso and Solana were granted a seat in second row. During the subsequent press conference, there were only two microphones on stage. One for the Russian President and one awkwardly shared by Sarkozy and Barroso. Solana was not allowed on stage and had to take a seat in the area designated for journalists. When the EU trio continued their trip to Tbilisi, Barroso did get a microphone himself on the platform with Sarkozy and Saakashvili, but Solana again had to sit with the journalists.

Despite these problems with protocol, the Troika, under the leadership of President Sarkozy, nonetheless reached an agreement with Russia about the partial withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia. The Russian army would leave Georgia proper by mid-October, if the EU would provide 200 monitors by 1 October to start monitoring the cease-fire agreement in the buffer zones outside South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Russian presence in the two breakaway regions was not included in the agreement, as Russia had recognized them as independent states. It was not willing to undo this recognition (FT 2008f). Russia furthermore made clear that the EU would not be monitoring the situation within the two regions (NYT 2008h). By agreeing to such terms, the EU thus *de facto* accepted the new borders, something explicitly noted by the NATO Secretary-General and many American observers (FT 2008g; Asmus 2010).

During the South Ossetia war it was thus clearly the French Presidency who was publicly speaking for the EU. It is telling that between the outbreak of the war (7 August) and the European Council meeting (1 September), there is not a single mention of Solana in either the *Financial Times* or the *International Herald Tribune*. President Sarkozy, on the other hand, was all over the news. That Solana did not have visibility during the South Ossetia war does not imply that he did not play a role. According to insiders, he was constantly on the phone with the various relevant actors including Russia, Georgia, France, the United Nations, the United States and Germany (interview 2009). Still, Solana was unable to compete with the Presidency as he had done in the case of Lebanon in terms of visibility. The Presidency had the political and diplomatic resources to play a role in this conflict itself. It furthermore used the protocol (head of state over foreign minister) and the formal Treaty rules to keep the High Representative at bay.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the size of the rotating Presidency mattered for its relationship with the High Representative. It has done so through two most-similar case studies about the EU's representation during the Israeli-Lebanese war (2006) and the South Ossetia war (2006). In the first case, it was the High Representative who spoke for the EU. Solana made an early move, which put him in an advantageous position during the remainder of the process, and he was recognized as the EU representative by third parties. The Finnish Presidency, on the contrary, initially took a wait-and-see approach. It felt uncomfortable with the situation and it did not have the political expertise to take a leading role. Instead it initially supported the

efforts of the UN Secretary-General. It was, however, unhappy with Solana taking the headlines. Yet when the Finnish Presidency eventually did visit the region, it was belated and the trip was unsuccessful.

While Solana had room to manoeuvre under the Finnish Presidency, the French Presidency instead directed the South Ossetia conflict from the Elysée. President Sarkozy flew to Moscow and Tbilisi alone and ignored the High Representative. This made an impression within the EU and with third parties. When the Russian army stayed in Georgia proper, contrary to the terms of the agreement, Sarkozy called for an extraordinary European Council. He furthermore championed the idea of having EU monitors in the region. After the recognition of independence by Russia, the European Council sent Sarkozy on a second mission together with the Commission President and the High Representative; it turned out again a one-man show. Solana did not play visible role in this conflict. He could not compete with the French head of state. Sarkozy is furthermore a known figure unlike the Finnish foreign minister, and the French Presidency had the expertise to bring this conflict to an end.

The two cases also provide empirical input for the two models discussed in the beginning of this article. There are elements of bureaucratic politics and the principal-agent model at work in both instances of conflict resolution. Solana had great difficulty to compete with the French Presidency. While it was easier to push the Finnish Presidency aside, their relations were not entirely cooperative. In terms of hierarchical relations, the Finnish Presidency refused to grant the High Representative an extensive mandate, which fits with the principal-agent model, and the French Presidency only allowed him to perform non-visible tasks behind the scenes. Although elements of both models are present in the two cases, it is also clear that they occupy different positions at the continuum between both models. The relations between the High Representative and the French Presidency were closer to the traditional principal-agent model, while under the Finnish Presidency such formal relations were less relevant. With the Finnish Presidency it was more a question of resources. The significant autonomy of Solana during the Israeli-Lebanese war is striking compared to his role envisaged by the Treaties.

Some words on methodology are also in place. A most-similar systems design is a good method to test one explanation. In terms of generalization, however, most-similar studies work best with cases that are broadly representative of the population (Seawright and Gerring 2008). It is in this respect that small-n studies are inevitably challenged on external validity. Few events in international relations are, after all, exactly alike. An important question, in this respect, is to what extent the chosen Presidencies are representative of small and large member states. Needless to say, none of Presidencies are exactly the same (Elgström 2003b and the annual reviews of the Journal of Common Market Studies). They have all different foreign policy traditions, roles and identities. That having been said, the limited diplomatic experience and resources, and the risk averse behaviour of the Finnish Presidency is not atypical for actions of small EU member states. Whether the French Presidency reflected EU-3 behaviour is more debatable. Germany and the United Kingdom would probably have handled the situation differently (see, for example, Gross 2009). It is, however, unlikely that

both would have extensively relied on Brussels. In relations with Moscow, Berlin prefers to ignore the EU. London generally does not even consider it. To provide, however, a more definite answer to such questions, additional evidence through further research is required. Cases that may confirm the argument presented in this article are the crises in Macedonia (2001) and Ukraine (2004), where the High Representative played a major role compared to the Belgian and Dutch Presidencies respectively. This also brings us to other explanatory variables. This article has recognized that there are other explanations apart from the size of the Presidency. Further research could test these alternative explanations as well.

The institutional relationship between the rotating Presidency and the High Representative dominated the last decade with respect to external representation in the EU. With the Lisbon Treaty, the Presidency plays a less prominent role in foreign policy. To what extent are the findings of this article then still relevant for current affairs? There are at least three answers. Firstly, formal rules are less relevant in practice than on paper. There is already evidence that European Council President Herman van Rompuy is gradually building up a foreign policy profile, despite his limited formal foreign policy function. Secondly, EU actors have to take internal (bureaucratic) politics seriously. It seems that Lady Ashton has eschewed turf wars with other actors so far and this comes at her own peril. Thirdly, international networks and third party recognition are of pivotal importance for the external representative. Within the European External Action Service, diplomatic expertise is being built up, but it is not always clear whether the EU spends enough time on how its leaders are perceived abroad. Lady Ashton can learn something from Solana in this respect.

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Endnotes

[1]As this article is interested in visibility, it extensively makes use of newspaper articles and press statements as empirical sources. The author has also conducted a limited number of elite interviews, on the basis of anonymity, with officials closely involved in the mediation activities of the rotating Presidency and the High Representative to confirm some of the findings. As the total number of involved officials was rather small, no information is disclosed in the article on the affiliation of these interviewees.

[2]The Financial Times, New York Times and International Herald Tribute are abbreviated as FT, NYT, IHT.

[3]Population is used as an indicator for size. Within the EU, it closely correlates with GDP and diplomatic resources.

[4]For a detailed description of the war, see Harel and Issacharoff (2008). For a background on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL, 1978-date), see Skogmo (1989), Hillen (2000) and Makdisi et al. (2009).

[5]France refused to act through the normal United Nations command and control procedures. It demanded instead to have officers from EU states in charge of the planning and the conduct of operations. It used its troop contribution as a bargaining chip until the UN bureaucracies finally gave in. An *ad hoc* Strategic Military Cell was established in New York and France increased its contribution (see Hatto 2009; Mattelaer 2009).

[6]For a detailed description of the background and the war, see Allison (2008), Antonenko (2009), Cornell and Starr (2009) and Asmus (2010).