

The Quint: Acknowledging the Existence of a Big Four-US Directoire at the Heart of the European Union's Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process *

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Introduction

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union (EU), its impact on the outside world and its functionality have been widely studied by academics and researchers since its creation in 1993. One understudied but major aspect of the CFSP is the way EU foreign policy communication and negotiation takes place unofficially. The EU Member States representatives are in constant contact at all levels (from the working group to the Political and Security Committee and General Affairs Council level), and the variable geometry and inner groups which establish bilateral or multilateral relations with one another seem to have a particular say in the decision-making process. Big Member States are especially known to negotiate amongst themselves before going to the Council table¹. One group would seem distinctly essential to the EU's foreign policy decision-making process, namely the Quint. The Quint includes only five States: France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy (named hereafter the Big Four) and a notable outsider - the US. The Quint is considered here as a Directoire, in the sense that it seems to be a leadership group in the EU decision-making process that dominates the other EU Member States: on some occasions the final EU decision seems to reflect the outcome of the discussions made within this directoire. The Quint therefore appears to be more than a mere consultative group that pools ideas; it is a group that takes initiatives, discusses EU's foreign policy issues and small EU countries have to accept its authority. The existence of this group has implications on the nature and conditions for cooperation among the EU Member States, and on the theory related to the CFSP, EU integration and action. Despite the difficulty in fully grasping the functionality of the Quint, this paper first studies the origin of the Quint, secondly looks at its characteristics and finally attempts to shed new light on the EU's foreign policy decision-making process².

I. The Quint's Origins: the Idea of a Directoire

An overview of the distant origins of the Quint will be given, before analysing its direct parent, namely the Contact Group on Bosnia.

Sustained but Unsuccessful Attempts At Creating a Directoire

The origin of the Quint lies in three forms of Directoire. First, there was the idea of a Directoire between the big Western States and the US, independent of the European Communities and of any Western European cooperation framework on foreign policy. Secondly, there was the idea of an

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¹ As an example of bilateral negotiation that leads to an EU decision, the EU's Code of Conduct on Arms Exports was first negotiated between the UK and France before being accepted at the EU level. See Answer 98/157 to written question No P-315/98 by Ms Theorin (PSE) on the EU Code of Conduct, European Parliament, Strasbourg, 11 May 1998.

² This analysis should contribute greatly to research on the EU's Foreign Policy as no research on EU foreign policy, EU decision-making process or EU-US relations ever mentions the Quint. Peterson and Bomberg do mention a Quint but define it as bringing together the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain in order to discuss relations with Turkey (Peterson and Bomberg 1999, p. 237).

institutionalised link between the US and European Political Cooperation (EPC) Member States. Finally, there was the idea of a Directoire among a limited number of EPC Member States.

The idea of a Directoire between the big Western States and the US on foreign policy issues was raised by the French President Charles De Gaulle, the British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and the American President Dwight D. Eisenhower, only to be aborted (Kotsonis 1997, pp. 40-43, Harrison 1981, Macmillan 1972, Schoenbrun 1966). On 17 September 1958, De Gaulle sent a memorandum to Eisenhower and Macmillan, whereby he proposed the creation of a tripartite organisation at the global political and strategic level. Its aim was to coordinate global security policies, administrate and plan the use of nuclear weapons and implicitly to reorganise NATO. Eisenhower answered: "we cannot afford to adopt any system which would give to our other allies, or other free world countries, the impression that basic decisions affecting their own vital interests are being made without their participation" (Harrison 1981, p. 88). In December 1959, Eisenhower accepted the institutionalisation of a high-level tripartite dialogue on the condition that the arrangement be kept secret and be disassociated from NATO. However, this agreement –known as the Rambouillet agreement- was not implemented. Strangely enough, the 1961 Fouchet plan foreseeing the creation of a common foreign policy may very likely be linked to the failure of an early attempt at a US-UK-French directorate.

Secondly, after the idea of an EPC was launched at the Hague in 1969, some attempts to institutionalise and further develop US-EPC Member States relations were made by Germany and rejected by France. In 1972, Germany wanted to institutionalise the dialogue and to have an appropriate consultative machinery with the US. France refused as it argued that this would be detrimental to Europe's independence: "France refused to reinforce consultations as this would mean giving the Americans a quasi-permanent "droit de regard" over the Community's affairs. France did not accept the argument put forward by Britain that such rights would be reciprocal. This could not be so, the French insisted, due to the different institutional structures and decision-making mechanisms of the EC and the US" (Le Monde 15/11/73, quoted in Kotsonis 1997, p.107). In 1974, Brandt argued that forming a front against the US was out of the question. He stressed that "Nixon had a legitimate reason for wanting to discuss and cooperate with the European policy-making at an early stage, and that the process of consulting America before final decisions were reached in Europe had not always been followed in the past" (Financial Times, 21/03/74, in Kotsonis 1997, p. 120). At the informal Gymnich summit in April 1974, the Member States accepted both consultations with the US before a Foreign Affairs Ministers' decision was taken, and consultations on a bilateral basis (but neither consultations at the Political Directors' nor at the working groups' level, although this was wanted by Germany, the UK and the US)³. Finally, in the 1980s, Italy, the UK and Germany were in favour of coordination with the US at all levels of European decision-making process. The then Italian foreign minister Emilio Colombo wanted a Euro-American Friendship Pact which would provide for "periodic meetings between foreign affairs ministers to coordinate their respective views particularly in times of crisis" and the German foreign minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher was in favour of informal NATO ministerial meetings (Kotsonis 1997, p. 161). In 1986, proposals for institutionalising and multiplying the relations between the EC's Member States and the US were made by COREU (unsurprisingly, France did not produce any proposal). The institutionalisation of the relations has more to do with official US-EC Member States relations. However, the multiplying of the relations shows the will on the part of at least Germany, the UK and Italy to be in constant contact with the US.

Finally, there were talks of a big three EPC Member States directoire or "trilateral axis" (France, Germany and the United Kingdom) in the seventies. The other EPC Member States insisted on resisting "any institutional developments which took EPC further down the intergovernmental road" (Nuttall 1992, p. 72). In addition, privileged bilateral relations such as the Franco-German motor or the UK-Italian relationship were, and still are, a constant feature of the European Union's functioning.

The Contact Group, Structured Relations between the US, Russia and the Big Four

The creation of the Contact Group for the Balkans corresponds to the first acknowledgment by the EU Member States of a Directoire outside the EU framework⁴. The Contact Group contains elements of

³ The November 1976 European Council stated that "the Nine Foreign Affairs Ministers decided that the Presidency should inform the US embassy in its capital about the agenda before a Political Committee meeting takes place and of its result", quoted in Kotsonis 1997, p. 143.

⁴ The concept of the Contact Group is not a new one. From April 1977 to mid-1982, a Contact Group made up of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, the Federal Republic of Germany, and France worked to negotiate an agreement for Namibian independence. At the time, EPC was "content to leave action to that body" (Nuttall 1992, p. 152, and Karns and

the three directorates mentioned above and has a new dimension to it as it includes Russia. It held its first ministerial meeting on 25 April 1994 at the London Conference (three years after the collapse of Yugoslavia on 25 June 1991) and encompassed France, the UK, Germany, the US and Russia (and Italy in 1996 after it held the Presidency⁵). Its aim was to give a coherent response to the Bosnian crisis. It was the first time an informal grouping was formalised outside the EU framework: before its creation, the EC with its Troika and Presidency met with the UN (FORPRONU and UN mediators) and had unsuccessfully tried to negotiate. Technically, the Contact Group meets at three levels: foreign ministers' level, political directors' level, and working group level. It developed links with the EU structure: firstly, the EU was represented at the Contact Group as the Commission and the Troika had observer status (Schwegmann 2000, p. 2). Secondly, Contact Group meetings were – and still are, as the Contact Group is still currently holding meetings to discuss the situation in the Balkans, but quite infrequently – followed by debriefings within the EU structure and press releases. Thirdly, the Contact Group is mentioned in GAC conclusions (only since 1998). The Contact Group can therefore be considered as an acknowledged grouping.

The reaction of the EU revealed a disapproval on the part of the Member States which did not participate in the Contact Group: “the Member States discussed the existence of the Contact Group and the nomination by Lord David Owen of three EU experts in the Contact Group during two and a half hours at the Political Committee on 10 May 1994. The Netherlands and other countries noted that the Maastricht Treaty did not foresee the creation of ad hoc bodies, and that the Presidency or the Troika were the only bodies that could implement CFSP. These Member States refused to recognise the Contact's Group existence” (Boidevaix 1997, p. 65; and interview with an EU official, 11/06/01). As a consequence, the term “Contact Group” only appeared for the first time in the GAC conclusions of March 1998 under the British Presidency and during the Kosovo crisis: it was never mentioned during the crisis in Bosnia. The Commission also reacted to the existence of the Contact Group. Without quoting it directly, the Commission acknowledged the important link between the US and the EU. It stated that “the US is a major partner and the comprehensive relationship is particularly close on a range of issues stretching from trade and politics to foreign policy and security” (Commission 2000, p. 6). As regards the Contact Group, the Commission seems to perceive it as a threat as it stressed that “the decisions taken at the Contact Group should be taken at the EU level” (Schwegmann 2000). Unsurprisingly, the Contact Group is therefore considered by the EU institutions and the majority of the Member States as having a negative impact on the EU's decision-making process.

Although most of the interviewees date the creation of the Quint after the creation of the Contact Group for Bosnia, the Quint seems to have started existing within the NATO framework, when there were discussions about Greece and Turkey⁶. The formula was reproduced later on for discussing EU policy as it was considered as a positive coordination mechanism between the US and the Big Four belonging both to NATO and the EU. In Bosnia, there were disagreements between the Europeans and the US. The then President of Yugoslavia Slobodan Milosevic could thus play on this division. The Quint enabled the Europeans and the US to go on with discussions, separately from the Russians. After Rambouillet, the Contact Group came virtually to a halt, but the Quint apparently continued. The next section will analyse the characteristics of the Quint, phoenix of the Contact Group.

II. The Quint's Characteristics: A Discreet Group Focused on Highly Sensitive EU Policies

The difference between the Quint and the Contact Group is that the Quint does not include Russia, is not acknowledged by the EU Member States, and seems to discuss issues which are not restricted to the policy towards the Balkans. The Quint is a very discreet institution. Firstly, it is officially rarely mentioned: the Quint cannot be found on the French, British and German Foreign Affairs Ministries websites. However, as proof of its existence, official references are made to it on the American State

Mingst 1990). Similarly, other ad hoc groups such as the “Group of Friends of the Secretary General of the United Nations” have been created to solve crises in El Salvador, Haiti, Western Sahara, Georgia, Guatemala, Suriname and Tajikistan (Krasno 1996, Boutros-Gali 1996, p. 94). Finally, the Permanent 5 (P5: United States, United Kingdom, France, Russia and China) in the United Nations Security Council is also a group that deals with foreign policy issues.

⁵ Italy had made membership of the Contact Group a key foreign policy objective: in September 1995, the Italian Foreign Minister Agnelli denied access to American stealth bombers to the Northern base of Aviano (to fly over to Bosnia) until Italy was allowed in the Contact Group. In the meantime, hasty plans were made to deploy cruise missiles instead (Bildt 1998, p. 101, Phillips 1995).

⁶ Interview with EU officials, 18/02/00 and 18/03/01.

Department website and on the Italian Foreign Affairs website⁷. Secondly, the press has reported on the Quint on only very rare occasions between 1999 and 2001. Thirdly, although all diplomats seem to know about its existence⁸, they either know little about its functions or are quite reluctant to divulge any detailed information about it. Indeed, the High Representative does not want to “hear that name mentioned within the walls of the Council of the European Union”⁹. What follows provides firstly an overview of the Quint’s structure and mechanisms and secondly an analysis of the Quint’s apparent field of interest.

The Quint’s Structure and Mechanisms

The Quint encompasses five states: the US, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and since the Italian Presidency, Italy. The Quint is thus extremely limited in its membership. In addition, it seldom associates the Council secretariat –although during Spring and Summer 2001, the Council Secretariat was present at the Quint due to the role played by the EU’s High Representative Javier Solana in Macedonia. Finally, it rarely involves the Commission, and it seems to exclude the Presidency of the EU¹⁰. The Quint meets whenever it is necessary on an ad hoc basis, and quite frequently: during the Kosovo crisis for instance, “the five would speak by telephone conference every evening” (Lockwood 1999). Since the crisis, the Quint conference calls take place only once every two weeks. The Quint meets “at the ministers’ level, at the Political Committee level and at experts level”¹¹: it therefore has adopted the EU framework for its own meetings. Quint members meet one another in various fora, such as NATO, the OSCE and the UN. The Italian Foreign Minister Alberto Dini emphasised in 1999 that “the Quint consists of those five countries’ foreign affairs ministers, who often negotiate over the phone in telephone conferences” (Luzi 1999). The US Ambassador to the European Union Richard Morningstar did not mention the Quint per se. However, he did stress that “in addition to the NATO alliance, the US and the EU are cooperating very closely in other fora on important political and security issues such as Southeast Europe, Russia, Ukraine and in a host of other areas around the world” (Morningstar 2000, p. 4) and that “the Political and Security Committee is a very important body. We are dealing more and more with it” (Morningstar 2001).

The Quint can be categorised as what academia considers as a “coalition of the willing” (Missiroli 1999), a coalition of Member States willing to reach an agreement outside the CFSP official decision-making process. The Quint could also be defined as a coalition of the unsuccessful willing, as the disagreements among the states involved are apparently not always solved. For instance, the Quint “first improvised, at Germany’s insistence, Nato’s five conditions for an end to the war: an offer which was immediately rejected by the White House” (The Observer 1999).

The Quint has a non-communication strategy. Very few officials acknowledge its existence. In February 1997, the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright did not directly answer a question on the Quint (what do you think about having a so-called core summit of a small group of NATO states before Madrid?) but she did not deny its existence. The German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel also acknowledged the existence of the Quint without naming it: to the question “are you still pushing and supporting the French idea of a “quint” summit before Madrid?”, he answered “we should coordinate our actions very closely, as we have done so far on this matter” (Albright and Kinkel 1997). In July 1999, Dini mentioned that the issue of aid to Serbia “has been under discussion and under constant review on the part of the countries, particularly in the Quint, but more generally the European Union and with the United States” (Albright and Dini 1999). In addition, there are no reports or summaries and no record of the meetings as there is no secretariat, except for rare reports from the Big Four which do disclose some information on the Quint’s meetings¹². The Quint does not divulge the outcome of its meetings to the representatives of the EU Member States (it is not as transparent as the Contact Group which does inform the EU Member States). As some of the Big Four share their

⁷ When searching for “Quint” on the French, German and British foreign affairs websites, references are either made to Charles Quint or to the Quint in the international negotiations on agriculture (here the Quint refers to the US, the EU, Japan, Canada and Australia).

⁸ In fact, small countries are quite angry about the existence of this group, Interview with an EU official, 17/02/00.

⁹ Interview with an EU official, 18/02/00.

¹⁰ The Commission takes part in the Quint from time to time (Interview with EU officials, 17/02/00 and 18/02/00). Officials from the Council Secretariat have been present at some meetings of the Quint (Interview with EU officials, 08/05/00 and 02/07/01). The involvement of the EU institutions in the Quint is therefore different from that in the Contact Group, as EU institutions are not automatically present at the Quint.

¹¹ Interview with an EU official, 17/02/00.

¹² Interview with EU officials, 17/02/00 and 18/02/00.

diplomatic reporting with the Council Secretariat, some reports of the Quint meetings appear to have found their way into the Council Secretariat. Being in regular contact with Foreign Ministers of Member States actively participating in Quint discussions, it can be assumed that the EU's High Representative is informed about the operational results of Quint meetings. Likewise, as the political directors are in permanent contact with one another, it is conceivable that some information is passed on tacitly to the Presidency¹³.

A typology of the groups that discuss EU matters can be constructed here in order both to situate the Quint in the decision-making process of the EU's foreign policy and to stress the importance of the unofficial links among the EU Member States. The unofficial groups are either within the EU framework or outside it. The unofficial groups within the EU framework are accepted by the majority of the EU Member States and institutions as they can all create this type of group (for instance France and the UK, the Nordic group, the Big Member States). The groups outside the EU framework are not accepted by the majority of the EU Member States and institutions, as the latter do not usually take part in these groups. The unofficial groups outside the EU framework are either acknowledged -in the sense that they are publicised- (here the Contact Group) or unacknowledged (such as the Quint). The following table sums up the type of groups that discuss EU matters.

Type of groups that discuss EU matters:

OFFICIAL:	UNOFFICIAL	
	within the EU framework: ACCEPTED groups	outside the EU framework: UNACCEPTED
		<div>ACKNOWLEDGED group:</div> <div>UNACKNOWLEDGED group:</div>
General Affairs Council, Political and Security Committee, working groups	For instance bilateral (France and the UK, Italy and the UK, or France and Germany) or multilateral groups (all the Big Member States)	<div>Contact Group</div> <div>Quint</div>

The Quint's Apparent Field of Interest: EU matters related to the Balkans and other major sensitive issues

The Quint held regular meetings to discuss EU matters related to the Balkans. For instance, as regards the Kosovo crisis, "the Quint had begun on 29 March [1999]... At tea-time each day in London - and after lunch for Madeleine Albright in the US- they would review the progress of the war and the prospects for a negotiated peace. And the original Quint of Foreign Ministers developed throughout the campaign so that by the end there were parallel Quints of Chiefs of the Defence Staff and political directors from the five Chancelleries, all teleconferencing each evening" (The Observer 1999). In addition, the Quint met to discuss the Macedonian question (Strauss and Smith 2001).

As regards the Quint's concern for other sensitive issues, an EU official stressed that "with Rambouillet the Contact Group ceased its "effective" existence. However, the Quint continued its meetings on different issues: Turkey, the enlargement process and Russia"¹⁴. As regards the policy towards Russia, "during the Istanbul summit of the OSCE, the night before the summit opened, the five dined together to coordinate their stance toward Russia. They agreed that Russia would not be directly condemned for its excesses in Chechnya" (Lockwood 1999). Dini reported that "intensive consultations and discussions had been held during past days, firstly between the main European countries and then more particularly, ... by the Quint" (Luzi 1999). The Quint therefore seems to discuss major sensitive issues addressed by the EU. The implications of the existence of the Quint for the European Union's foreign policy decision-making process will now be analysed.

III. The Implications of the Existence of the Quint for the EU's Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process

¹³ Interview with EU officials, 17/02/00, 18/03/01 and 02/07/01.

¹⁴ Interview with an EU official, 18/02/00.

The existence of the Quint is not a surprise *per se*, as it seems quite normal that the US and the Big Four should meet to discuss highly sensitive foreign affairs issues. However, the existence of the Quint raises two questions. One question concerns the functionality of the EU's foreign policy decision-making process: the EU is already considered by some academics as a body incapable of implementing its decisions. The CFSP has been described as "paralysed" (Zielonka 1998) and as "neither common, nor foreign, nor dealing with security, nor a policy" (Rummel and Wiedemann 1998). Is the EU also not even the author of its own decisions? A second question relates to the effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy decision-making process: is the EU more effective with the existence of the Quint than without?

The Quint as a Threat to a Common European Union Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process

The existence of the Quint can be seen as a negation of the CFSP for three reasons. Firstly, it is totally external to the CFSP decision-making process but discusses regularly all CFSP policy issues. One interviewee even stated that "it has an obvious direct impact on the EU's decisions"¹⁵. The EU's foreign policy decision-making process can be considered as discredited if the bulk of decisions is determined outside the EU framework.

Secondly, institutionally, it is a very dangerous exercise as some EU Member States are separated from decision-making and shaping: it is effectively a *directoire*. Other Big EU Member States are excluded from it (such as Spain and the Netherlands). The Netherlands is particularly against the Quint: its slogan at the Council meetings is known to be "no taxation without participation"¹⁶. The EU decision seems undemocratic as the majority of the Member States do not take part in it: "there is a constant fight between the Member States in and those out, and the other Member States left out feel excluded"¹⁷. Sir David Hannay, UK Special Coordinator for Cyprus and former UK Permanent Representative to the European Community, stressed that "somehow, the EU will have to avoid restricted groupings as they are damaging for the solidarity of the EU.. but it will have to go on with them unofficially" (Hannay 2001). Indeed, no big EU Member State can accept to lose its decision-making power to small Member States which do not have the military power to act abroad. Van den Broek, when talking about the proliferation of formations created for coordinating foreign policies, noted that these formations are "harmful to the image of CFSP as a unitary policy" (Van den Broek, quoted in Pappas and Vanhoonacker 1996, p. 28¹⁸). Many academics also consider this kind of unofficial group as a competitor to the EU: Christopher Hill stressed that "unfortunately for the EU, the EU's decision-making process involves outsiders to the EU"¹⁹. Simon Nuttall also underlined the fact that the Contact Group was like a "rival forum to the CFSP" (Nuttall 2000, p. 13). According to Helen Wallace, "to the Community purist the notion that bilateral, let alone trilateral, relations are an intrinsic feature of the system smacks of heresy" (Wallace 1986, p. 156). Finally, Daniel Vernet went as far as to see this kind of group as representing "the return of the powerful nations in Europe" (Vernet 1995, pp. 132-138). The fact that sensitive issues are discussed outside the EU framework could imply that the EU is a mere framework and not an action organisation²⁰, as it neither decides or implements any policy.

Finally, the US, an external body to the EU, is effectively part of it. To what extent does the US play a role in defining an EU position?²¹ In 1974, the French Foreign Affairs Minister stressed that "the US

¹⁵ Interview with an EU official, 15/02/00.

¹⁶ The Netherlands is indeed a large contributor in terms of aid to the Balkans; it thus "stresses it should be able to decide on a policy that it is "paying" for", interview with an EU official, 11/06/01.

¹⁷ Interview with an EU official, 17/02/00. Similarly, when studying the effect of the Contact Group, Nuttall mentioned this attitude: "it was resented by those who felt they were being excluded" (Nuttall 2000, p. 13). Bretherton and Vogler also stressed that "the creation of the Contact Group annoyed and upset the other Member States" (Bretherton and Vogler 1999, p. 177).

¹⁸ Van den Broek mentions that Germany, France, the UK, and the US were responsible for the CSCE; the ambassadors of Germany, France and the UK concerted their positions outside the EU framework for dealing with Turkey; the Nordic group gathered together for adopting a position on US financial arrears in the UN; a group made up of Austria, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, and Sweden... had a common position on non-proliferation; Germany, France, Italy, the UK, and Turkey were known as the Cyprus Pentagonale; and the US, Russia and Portugal acted together in the Angola Troika.

¹⁹ Hill, interview at ECPR (European Consortium for Political Research) Summer School on « EU External Capability and Influence in International Relations », Geneva, September 2000.

²⁰ In Christopher Hill's terms. See Guido Lenzi, in Zielonka 1998, footnote 19, p. 115.

²¹ When studying the reasons for cooperation among the EU Member States and looking at the influence of the US on the EU's decision-making process, other questions regarding the EU-US relation come into mind such as "does the US consult with the

must on no account be allowed to become the 10th member of the EC" (The Guardian 11/06/74 quoted in Kotsonis 1997, p. 131). At the beginning of the 21st century, the US is not only the fifth member of the leadership group of the EU, it is also an unofficial external member of the EU via the Quint. Even if this fifth member does not enjoy the same official status as the fifteen EU Member States, as it does not have a veto power over the EU Member States, it is present in the EU's foreign policy decision-making process.

The Quint as a Method for an Effective European Foreign Policy

Yet, the Quint also brings three positive elements to the way the EU's foreign policy is perceived. Firstly, it leads to an EU decision despite the fact that the decision-making process involves a non EU actor and a small group of big EU Member States.

Secondly, the Quint makes the EU credible. The importance of the CFSP is acknowledged by the US, as the US wants to be part of the EU's decision-making process by using the Quint. In addition, the Big Four do their utmost to find an agreement within the Quint in order to facilitate the taking of a CFSP decision. The Quint is therefore not only a question of coordination between the US and the Big Four but also of coordination among the Big Four. When looking at the role of the Contact Group, a similar phenomenon of big EU Member States was analysed: "the effective outcome of the Contact Group is to have succeeded in coordinating the policies not only between the Europeans, the Russians and the Americans, but also among the Europeans themselves" (Boidevaix 1997, p. 71). Indeed, when the US wanted to lift the arms embargo on the Bosnian Muslims, the UK and France, which had UN peacekeeping contingents in Bosnia, did not want to endanger their troops. Germany was closer to the US as it wanted to isolate the Bosnian Serbs but "it did not want to break away from its European partners" (Leigh-Phippard 1998, p. 309). European solidarity therefore succeeded. Likewise, the Quint enables the Big Four to coordinate their positions and reach an agreement: "when France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy agree, one can be almost sure that the Quint is behind that agreement"²². The Quint therefore appears to be a trigger for cooperation among the Big Four when highly sensitive issues are at stake. Interestingly, the existence of the Quint also mitigates bilateral axes such as the Franco-German or the Italo-British relationships.

Thirdly, the Quint is a way to take the US on board. In 1993, France and Germany came to a common position on a peace plan for Bosnia. The US was needed to support this plan. The French Defence Committee noted that the Contact Group needed NATO support in order to have an impact on third parties (Quiles and Lamy 1999, p. 18). The EU therefore needs to have US support to implement its policy, and it can use the US to implement its policy. The Big Four try to make the most of the US, which is all the more difficult when they need the US capabilities. The Quint therefore can make the EU's foreign policy more effective. Theoretically, the special relation between the US and the Big Four shows that the externalisation concept needs to be revived, as the Big Four are indeed "forced to hammer out a collective external position" in order to respond to the third country they have reached an initial agreement on a policy with (Schmitter 1969, p. 165). However, this concept needs to be refined: the Big Four are not only responding collectively to a third country, they are also considering the third country's policy when making their own policy towards a fourth country: we could here speak of an internalisation of the externalisation process.

Whether the Quint is negative or positive for the EU's foreign policy, it appears to be a necessary structure. The EU Member States are aware of the importance and inevitability of the Quint as firstly it can dispose of more resources than the EU (ie. the US resources). Secondly, it generally enables a decision to be taken more effectively than when discussed by fifteen Member States. As studied by Zartman, Rubin and Swap, leadership must be exercised for an outcome to be achieved (Rubin and Swap in Zartman 1994). Thirdly, a *directoire* type of group seems to be more effective than fifteen Member States when addressing crisis situations. Malcom Rifkind, talking about the Balkans' crisis, stressed indeed that "fast moving diplomacy required that a minority led diplomacy" (Rifkind, quoted in Boidevaix 1997, p. 11). The following table sums up the negative and positive aspects of the existence of the Quint for the EU's foreign policy decision-making process.

EU on its own foreign policy?" and "does the EU influence the US policy making?". These two questions would be worth looking into by future researchers.

²² Interview with an EU official, 18/02/00.

Negative aspects	Positive aspects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The EU's decision-making process is discredited as the decisions seem to be taken elsewhere. ▪ The EU's decision seems undemocratic as the majority of the Member States are excluded from the decision-making process. ▪ An external actor is part of the EU's decision-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The final outcome is an EU decision despite the non EU character of the decision-making process. ▪ The EU is credible: first, the role of the EU's foreign policy role is acknowledged by the US. Secondly, the EU Big Four are forced to cooperate with one another and to present a coherent foreign policy (the Quint takes over both intra EU bilateral relations and EU Member States-US bilateral relations). ▪ The EU can take the US on board.

IV. Conclusion

To conclude, the existence of the Quint reveals the importance of both unofficial relations and the United States when looking at the European Union's CFSP decision-making process. Firstly, the Quint as a new form of diplomacy must be acknowledged. It is highly probable that it worked on a regular basis during the Kosovo crisis and it seems to be involved in discussing sensitive issues, for instance Chechnya. In addition, other unofficial groups such as the Nordic group should be researched as they seem to be becoming institutionalised within the EU's decision-making process. The existence of such groups could effectively be the solution to cooperation in an enlarged EU. Secondly, it indicates that the relations between some EU Member States and the US are extensively developed.

Theoretically, the existence of the Quint shows the importance of "coalitions of the willing". In addition, the presence of the US in the EU's decision-making process reveals that Member State interests are not merely determined by domestic arenas and the international economic situation as suggested by liberal intergovernmentalism, nor by the institutions, the socialisation process and a learning process as stressed by institutionalist theories. Member States' interests are also dependent on the position of external actors on a given foreign policy, and more precisely on the position of a credible and effective external actor, namely the United States: there is effectively an internalisation of the externalisation concept.

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Abstract:

The Quint is an unofficial group which is at the heart of the EU's decision-making process and of the EU-US relations in terms of defining the EU's foreign policy. It includes five states: the US, France, the United Kingdom, Germany and Italy. When discussing highly sensitive foreign policy, the Big EU Member States seem to consult their American counterpart. This is not a surprise *per se*. However, the unofficial presence of the US in the EU's decision-making process is rarely observed by the press or by academics. In order to address the gap in the understanding of unofficial European foreign policy decision-making, this article looks at (I) the origins of the Quint, then explains (II) how the Quint operates, and finally analyses (III) the implications of the existence of the Quint for the EU's foreign policy.

Length:

5030 words (+ 915 words in the footnotes)

Inclusion of two diagrams