Ph.D. in Political Science by Gjovalin Macaj

The Ph.D. thesis is called "DYSFUNCTIONAL ENDEAVOUR: The Pursuit of EU Unity in the UN Human Rights Council".
(Promotor: Prof. dr. Gustaaf Geeraerts)

Abstract

This thesis explores the pursuit of collective action among the constitutive members of the European Union (EU) in the United Nations Human Rights Council (henceforth the Council or the HRC), the UN’s prime organ in the field of human rights. It scrutinises the endeavour for collective EU action in function of its expected benefits for the EU’s influence in global governance and its codified commitment to advancing human rights globally. More specifically, the thesis explores the mechanism and the process by which EU member states and institutions mobilise to form, negotiate and build support for their collective initiatives and positions in relation to human rights standard-setting and protection activities of the HRC. The study finds that, contrary to received wisdom, the way in which EU states pursue and arrive at collective outcomes is dysfunctional and prevents them from reaping the expected benefits of collective EU action so as to advance their shared global human rights agenda. Even though EU member states and institutions make relentless efforts to coordinate their actions at multiple levels and across issues, they produce collective outcomes that are limited in scope and distorted in nature, marking a significant gap between the actual practice and expected benefits of collective EU action. The thesis explains these findings with the help of the work of Thomas Schelling, Kenneth Arrow and John Searle. It argues that the dysfunctional character of collective EU action can be understood in terms of insufficient collective intentionality among EU member states and inadequate modes of managing the dissonance between individual preferences at the micro-level (within the EU) and collective outcomes at the macro-level (as expressed in EU action or inaction in the HRC). Reflecting on these findings, the thesis calls for a differentiated approach toward the study and the application of EU unity in the HRC and in global governance more broadly.