The goals of the project were in 2005 formulated in the following way: What is characteristic of the European Union (EU) as a foreign policy actor, and what impact does the EU have on the international arena? As the EU has emerged as an autonomous source of influence in world politics, a lively debate has started on what influence it actually has (“is the EU a new superpower?”); its degree of coherence (“does the Union speak with one voice?”) and on the qualities that characterize its policies (does it act as a leader?). The project put its focus on the EU as other see it: the purpose was to investigate how non-EU actors perceive the motives behind, the performance and the impact of EU foreign policy in concrete cases of international negotiations. Empirically, the project wanted to highlight negotiations between the EU and regional groupings of African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (the ACP countries), with the aim of creating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) on development aid and trade between the parties.

The analytical goals have basically remained unchanged, though less attention has perhaps been paid to the EU’s international influence than was originally suggested. The focus has been on characteristics of the EU as an international negotiator, on its role performance (nota bene its leadership qualities) and on factors that have prevented or encouraged the Union to play an influential role in multilateral negotiations. This has been “measured” mainly by investigating how the EU is perceived by external actors. Empirically, the focus has been broadened to include not only the EPA negotiations, although these have been the main empirical study object, but also trade negotiations in general and climate change negotiations.

Three important findings
The project has generated 9 articles (8 published in international refereed journals) and 5 book chapters. Planning is underway for a monograph where the results of the project are to be brought together and streamlines. Our main findings include:

1. The EU is in the issue-areas under study widely perceived to be a great power, both due to its structural characteristics (being a major economic power) and its leadership qualities (especially acting as a role model). It should be pointed out, however, that we have not investigated the EU’s roles in traditional security issues.

2. This does not necessarily imply that the EU is always considered a leader (although it generally is). The main reasons for doubts about the Union’s leadership performance are a) a perceived lack of horizontal coherence (i.e. that it performs differently in different issue-areas, opening up for accusations of hypocrisy), leading to
concerns about the legitimacy of the EU as a leader, and b) problems of internal co-
ordination, leading to concerns about the effectiveness of the EU as an actor (demands
for internally negotiated standpoints result in the EU sometimes appearing inflexible and
slow in its decision-making).

3. External perceptions of the EU are remarkably similar regardless if we
analyse representatives of big powers or small states, developed or developing countries.
All actors agree on the great power-ness of the EU and on its leadership qualities, but
also in their main points of criticism. Developing countries are, however, more prone to
accuse the EU of hypocrisy and double-talk.

New research questions
The project has raised the question how the EU should be evaluated in comparison to
other similar actors. Does the EU differ in its great power role, and in its leadership
characteristics, from other states that are generally considered major powers and leaders?
While the EU is often claimed to be a “different” great power, and at times referred to as
a civilian or normative power, there is a lack of research that empirically and theoretically
investigate whether the EU is actually by outsiders perceived to perform differently. A
comparison between the perceived roles of the EU, the US and China in, for example,
trade and climate change negotiations would have been extremely rewarding and exciting,
especially in the light of the on-going discussion about an emerging new world order
where novel aspects of power are claimed to come to the fore, and where new powers
(China, India) are claimed to appear.

Two important publications

a) The article, written to-gather with two colleagues from the University of
Canterbury (New Zeeland), entitled “The EU as Others See It”. This was one of the first
publications where the value and importance of studying outsiders´ perceptions and
expectations of the EU (and for that matter other major powers) was advocated and
argued for. The article has been widely quoted and followed by a number of research
projects and an FP7 call with this orientation. We argued that to be able to assess both
self-proclaimed characteristics and the effectiveness of major powers, it is impossible to
sidestep the importance of using external actors´ perceptions as tools of evaluation.

b) The article on the EU in international trade negotiations. This was published
by the perhaps most influential European affairs journal, J. of Common Market Studies,
and has also led to a number of quotations and references. In this article, I highlighted the
leadership aspirations demonstrated by the EU in the World Trade Organization and
what strengths and weaknesses non-EU actors perceive in this role performance.