

10 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Jean-Marie Guéhenno

President

International Crisis Group

The refugee crisis is morphing into one about the very nature of the European project. This is far more critical for the Union than the euro crisis, which, ultimately, could be resolved with a show of financial solidarity and money. The refugee issue, however, strikes at the heart of the values that underpin EU members' core political solidarity.

As refugees continue to head northwards, the muted euro crisis-era criticism of Berlin's insufficient support for debtor countries has turned into a situation in which the EU's anchor state stands almost alone. It is particularly painful for Berlin, which has done much for the newcomers while several countries – among those ones that Germany helped bring into the Union – are not prepared to do their share.

Given these cracks opening up in the EU's foundations, a new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) must have the ambition to be more than just a 'good deal' for its member states.

The old continent will continue to see its divisions widen if it only tries to stand still, eventually either giving into realists who advocate minimalist goals, or

adopting a defensive agenda that dodges the difficult issues.

A quintet for action...

The question is, of course, how to make Europe globally relevant once again. First, European leaders must recognise two important long-term trends: the diminishing dominance of 'the West', of which Europe is a critical element; and the reduced capacity of old-fashioned military power to shape the world.

These two dynamics bind Europe inextricably to the US, and the relationship with Washington is the most important strategic element of any EU strategy. The US will remain militarily dominant for the foreseeable future even if the ability of the West's armies, navies and air forces to project power across the world is diminished. Democracies must stick together, too, conscious that the majority of the world's population live under non-democratic or semi-democratic systems.

But Europe should not adopt a policy of alignment, either, because the US, with its own priorities, is not

prepared to bail out Europe in all circumstances. To navigate between the dangerous extremes of denial on one hand and abdication of responsibility on the other, the EU should focus on those priorities where it has unique interests that do not conflict with those of the US, but are sufficiently distinct to require specific responses. Five spring to mind:

Russia: Moscow's growing military strength needs to be counterbalanced by a solid European military alliance with the US. But Russia's deepening socio-economic weaknesses require a specific European policy of engagement. After all, a failing Russia would be first and foremost a European problem.

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA): more than 45 million Muslims live in Europe, and most of their families came from the neighbouring MENA. Continued chaos in the region will generate more terrorism and more refugees. In response, Europe should do more to hold Turkey close. For political credibility, it also needs to develop a principled, united long-term policy, including on the Israel-Palestine conflict and issues of justice and accountability. Militarist policies alone will only backfire.

Sub-saharan Africa: the continent has the potential to become a major source of conflict and transnational terrorism if its many governance issues – particularly in the Sahel – are not addressed. But, successfully governed, it can also become the greatest engine of growth of the twenty-first century, considering its youthful demography, abundant natural and hydro-electric resources, and rich arable land.

Cybersecurity: this is a priority for all countries that have entered the digital age, and one in which the EU needs to protect its distinct privacy and commercial interests.

Rebuilding global institutions: this must be done even

if it means sharing more power. The EU is based on multilateralism and the rule of law, and it will wither away if the UN system, the Bretton Woods institutions, and regional organisations go into decline.

Absent from this list of priorities are Asia and Latin America. Despite important historic and economic links, they are not priorities, and the EU should accept that it finds it difficult to leverage its economic and limited military power for distant political goals.

‘...Europe needs confidence in itself. Foreign policy cannot be the product of a technocratic process; it must be the expression of a human community.’

...and a wider debate

To address Europe's main needs, the EUGS should integrate the Union's strong development policies, embrace more conflict prevention, make full use of regional dynamics, avoid quick fixes (especially military ones), and use principled engagement to consolidate the norms that give it most clout. The EU's weak crisis management shows how its inter-governmental approach no longer works. Europeans should build a shared strategic and military culture, without which a pro-active foreign policy, including effective force projection, is unlikely to emerge.

First, though, Europe needs confidence in itself. Foreign policy cannot be the product of a technocratic process; it must be the expression of a human community. In that regard, the most important strategic priority may well be to stop the fragmentation of Europe, integrate all its citizens into its politics, bureaucracies and narratives, and end the fear that is gripping national voters.

Ultimately, rather than the advice of experts, Europe needs a very public debate among all its citizens on what it stands for and what is worth defending.

