

22 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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The new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is both a necessity and an important opportunity for the European Union. It is a necessity because the EU needs to redefine its own role in a world fundamentally changed since the last strategy was devised twelve years ago.

Profound power shifts, multiple conflicts, new instruments of warfare, growing instability in the EU's neighbourhood, terrorism, as well as a reluctance of the US to engage in and with Europe, all require the Union to reassess its strategic priorities and objectives.

The tasks for now

The first necessary task of an EUGS in this context is to provide a collective understanding of the current and future challenges and opportunities the EU is facing in the world. This was largely accomplished with the document the High Representative presented to the European Council in June 2015.

Its second task is to remind the EU members of

their collective strengths, interests and responsibilities in today's world. Confronted with multiple and parallel crises, constant crisis management has taken priority over strategic reflection within the EU. The protracted time in which the EU has now been in crisis mode and the multiplicity of the political and economic backlashes have led to a sense of relativism among policymakers. The belief in the capacity to positively impact our collective futures is low. Political, as well as economic and intellectual elites no longer exclude the possibility of political failure and further demise of the integration project.

In this context, the EUGS is an important opportunity to seize. The EU remains a uniquely liberal, economically successful and democratically stable entity, based on principles and an *acquis* that should also shape the priorities of its external action. And because the European Union, despite the growing narrative of disintegration, is an integrated market, has a common currency shared by 19 member states and the principle of free movement enshrined in its treaties, there are collective vital interests to defend in an increasingly

complicated world. With domestic political actors more and more willing to emphasise national over European interests and external actors, such as Russia or China, deliberately pitting member states against each other, the EUGS should convincingly explain the need for and the objectives of joint action.

The most important contribution of the EUGS would, however, be to trigger further reflection and policymaking processes upon its completion. This would be achieved by explicitly recognising the limits such a strategic document has in an increasingly complex and rapidly changing region and world.

The tasks for later

The first task after the completion of the document would be to set up transnational fora for policymakers and the policy community to provide space and scope for continued assessment of emerging trends and shared risks and opportunities. The belated realisation of the scope of the migration crisis and the complexity of handling it is one example why this collective anticipatory capacity needs to be strengthened. Another example is the underestimation of the strategic implications of the crises with Greece, both as part of the euro area crisis and in the context of the migration crisis.

The lesson from these cases is that the EU needs to provide the space to evaluate crisis management decisions in the context of strategy, since the most pressing decisions in crises create path dependencies and have strategic implications beyond the boundaries of the policy areas concerned.

Second, in a similarly forward-looking perspective, it is imperative that a serious reflection takes place on the means and instruments the EU should

have at its disposal to tackle challenges and reach its objectives. A European ‘white book’ on defence would be a first important step into this direction, but given the complexity of challenges and responses, further tools should also be engaged.

The third task would be to consciously link the external and internal debates on challenges and strategy. The refugee crisis and threats such as hybrid warfare or terrorism show how the boundaries between internal and external developments are ever more blurred.

The EU can play an important role in linking the debate on domestic socio-economic and security developments with that on external threats and foreign and security policy. While this is happening increasingly at the level of member states, the EU can act as an important driver of taking the discussions on problems and challenges that are cross-border in nature to a transnational level.

It is very likely that not all member states will be willing and able to participate in the same way in a holistic discussion on strategy and the requisite means to implement it. In fact, differentiation between member states is likely to increase as a general trend in the EU. However, this can be counterbalanced by the recognition of member states that closer cooperation in external affairs is in their own strategic interests.

The EU needs to move towards more mature policymaking structures which not only means the availability of sufficient means and adequate instruments, but also the efficient and legitimate decision-making procedures that underpin their deployment.



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