

24 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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While policy planners work towards an EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), the priorities that have been spelled out thus far in a series of EU documents, as well as in speeches by HR/VP Mogherini have little to say on EU-Asia relations.

The most recent EU strategic review serves up a bland ‘the EU can offer consistent but also customised support to regional cooperation efforts in Asia. We also need to foster a rules-based approach to conflict management and respond to the opportunity presented by various developments in Asian connectivity.’ It refers to China as an emerged power in a subclause and dismisses diverse initiatives such as the BRICS, the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as unlikely to succeed.

Speaking at the EUGS conference organised by the EUISS and Real Institute Elcano, Barcelona, HR/VP Mogherini pointed to terrorism as an example of the “necessary link between different dimensions of action”, but while she spoke of Syria, Libya and

Iraq she omitted Afghanistan and Pakistan. That Europe should focus on internal and neighbourhood challenges is understandable – and indeed necessary given the current conditions – but it does not amount to an EUGS.

Prioritising Asia

A truly global strategy would put Asia at the top of foreign and security policies. Accounting for over two-thirds of global economic growth, the continent is changing rapidly with both short and long-term consequences for Europe, as well as the region.

There is a new map of Asia forming: a Chinese sphere of influence has emerged which extends west and southwards from China, through Central Asia and Russia to swathes of the Middle East and South Asia. Energy connectivity already exists between Central Asia and China and will soon include Russia from its east up to the Caucasus. Although transport connectivity is moving at a slower pace, China’s One Belt One Road will reinforce Beijing’s growing economic clout in Central and South Asia and the Middle East, while its dominance in the

SCO adds a security element to the mix.

India's neighbourhood and global strategies are being shaped by geopolitical changes in its region, where China has rapidly emerged as a critical player both on land and at sea. Although China is one of India's largest trading partners (with a huge trade imbalance in its favour) and the two countries work together in a number of multilateral forums such as the BRICS, AIIB, Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP) and SCO, Beijing is also a close ally of Pakistan, a country whose military remains dedicated to preventing India's rise.

Within India there is a clear perception that these factors necessitate an Indian push for more even trade relationships and greater connectivity across Asia, as well as close engagement on cooperative security mechanisms with all major players in the continent. Both are, or should be, priorities for Europe as well, given that the thrust for reform of the Bretton Woods institutions comes from Asia (originally led by India, it is now being driven by China). Although a large number of EU countries have signed up to the AIIB, the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and China-led Regional Cooperation Economic Partnership (RCEP) risk dividing Asia into two economic blocs, something which would be to the detriment of both Europe and India.

Russia's role in Asia also merits closer attention. Although Russia is broadly allied with China, Moscow's new 'Look East' policy – as showcased at the Vladivostok Far-Eastern Economic Forum in October 2015 – is also pitched to South Korea, Japan and India (though it is still China dominated). As the weaker partner to China, Russia has a greater interest in pursuing cooperative multilateralism in Asia. But the Russian government's room to

manoeuvre is constrained by its need for continued Chinese investment and Moscow – with a few notable exceptions – is yet to establish a positive track record in multilateral fora.

Countering terrorism

Given their shared threat, the sluggish cooperation between Europe and India on counter-terrorism is surprising. An effective EUGS would address this by attempting to link counter-terrorism bodies in the US, Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and Asia and envisage joint efforts to build the capacity to respond effectively. There are remarkably few countries that do or can

work together in this way, or that share the same interests in tackling terrorism. This is also all the more necessary because terrorist groups have already successfully internationalised their connections and operations.

The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and the subsequent proliferation of so-called 'foreign fighters' has rightly led Europe to look inwards, as India has had to when faced with externally-generated terrorist networks that seek internal support. Yet if Delhi and Brussels are to emerge stronger internally and externally as a result of the challenge posed by ISIL – which they will – mutual support and coordination will greatly increase the chances of doing so.

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