

27 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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If the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) correctly identified the central security challenges for the EU, it has undoubtedly been proven ineffective in finding proper methods to deal with them.

While the ESS rightfully proclaimed that 'Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free', the EU is now confronted with multiple internal challenges, ranging from economic problems to the rise of extremist political forces, exacerbated by an 'arc of instability' in its neighbourhood.

A new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is thus urgently needed. To start with, Europe needs to reflect on what went wrong. The EU's deteriorating external security environment can be attributed to two main factors: a resurgent Russia under President Putin, and greater conflict between the autocratic regimes and the disaffected publics of the Middle East and North Africa.

It is true that the Russian takeover of Crimea and its support for the separatist rebels in Ukraine have intensified conflict on the EU's doorstep. It is also

true that a number of autocratic regimes in the Middle East are resorting to repressive measures to suppress their own people, something which is, in turn, transforming more countries on the EU's southern flank into failed states.

That said, it is all too easy to lay the blame at the feet of others for the destabilised neighbourhood: as a key international player, EU policymakers also need to think about to what extent they, too, were responsible for the worrying developments of the recent past.

Two lessons to learn

At least two lessons can be drawn from the EU's past record. The first is that the EU needs to enhance its capacity to understand the strategic thinking of others, and factor that into the policymaking process so as to avoid unintended consequences.

The EU, as the ESS explicitly stated, has no interest in creating new dividing lines in Europe through the process of enlargement. Yet, in its attempts to integrate Ukraine, the EU critically un-

derestimated the resolve and capability of Putin's Russia to maintain its influence in an area which Moscow considers to be in its sphere of influence. The result is that the confrontation with Russia has ended up creating a new and accidental division in Europe.

The second lesson that the EU can learn is that it needs to strengthen its capacity to assess its policy options before it and its member states start to act. The Union has problems fostering common policies and positions when confronted with complicated and serious challenges. As a result, it can often appear to suffer from paralysis and inaction.

Recent developments also point to another related problematic aspect of the EU's foreign and security policy: without establishing common European guidelines, some key member states tend to act unilaterally and boldly, only to end up generating further unintended negative consequences for themselves and the Union as a whole.

Whether it was the Franco-British military intervention in Libya or Germany's decision to accept an unlimited number of refugees, well-intended decisions by national capitals only exacerbated Europe's problems at home and abroad.

The regime change in Libya did not lead the country to become more stable and democratic. Instead, it spawned a civil war, a perfect breeding ground for jihadist terrorists and a spring board for illegal migrants to Europe. In the case of the migration crisis, the wave of refugees did not subside following Berlin's unilateral move and instead increased, putting huge strain on the maintenance of the Schengen area, and causing serious friction between member states.

Two lessons to implement

Given these past lessons, the new EUGS needs first of all to strengthen the EU's capacity to understand the changing global environment and the aspiration and capacity of other players (be they state or non-state actors). It also needs to enhance the Union's ability to evaluate all policy options available.

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In order for this to be achieved, the European External Action Service (EEAS) needs to devote more resources to strategic planning and further mainstream its role in

the overall policymaking and policy coordination process. It also requires that the European Council takes greater interest in its task of maintaining strategic oversight and guidance of all foreign policy-related issues.

Facing multiple grave challenges at home and abroad, the EU cannot assume that its old ways of conducting foreign and security policy would continue to work in a substantially different world. To ensure that it continues to play an indispensable role in the shaping of the global order, a more strategic EU needs to be prudent and refrain from 'feel-good' policymaking.

Should it fail to address these shortcomings, the EU will be left only able to serve its short-term considerations at the expense of its long-term interests and global standing.

