European Union Institute for Security Studies

European Union Global Strategy

28 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Marta Dassù & Roberto Menotti

Editor in Chief & Deputy Editor of the quarterly journal Aspenia

Aspen Institute, Italy

After decades of theoretical debates about 'threats' facing Europe, jihadist terrorism and the influx of refugees are now proving to be the disruptive factors which are forcing the EU to consider stability in and around its southern borders as a structural security issue rather than a 'bureaucratic' one (e.g. the EU's Neighbourhood Policy). And given that the old distinction between internal and external security is obsolete, a Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is needed now more than ever before.

From containment to management

For the time being, however, all Europe has done to address these new risks is to adopt a policy of partial *containment*. The trouble is that this policy will work only if the problems spilling over from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) remain limited and do not escalate further: something which is far from guaranteed. With the lowest energy prices in over a decade, two regional wars, failing states, the partial disengagement of the US and a partial comeback by Russia, a quick fix solution is obviously not available – and in any case is in the hands of regional actors more than anybody else.

In a fluid context where the European capacity to shape events is even more limited than in the past, the challenge of defining the nature of 'threats' is still with us: while France, in particular, considers itself at war against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), other Europeans see much wider structural factors at play. Agreeing on the scope and nature of the risks in and from the MENA remains an unfulfilled precondition for any effective EUGS.

Against this background, a number of European political forces are sorely tempted by the idea of a 'fortress Europe'. As the unilateral suspension of Schengen by some member states has shown, what this means in effect is a return to sealed national borders, resulting in a domino effect. Such a scenario is particularly worrisome for countries like Greece and Italy, which fear the emergence of a 'mini-Schengen' with European frontiers shifting northwards. The paradox is clear: there are now much greater incentives for an EUGS but the immediate defensive reaction of national governments is dividing the EU instead of uniting it.

France, in the wake of the 13 November terrorist attacks, invoked the 'mutual defence clause' (Article 42.7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) for the first time since the Lisbon Treaty came into force. At the same time, Paris refrained from evoking the 'solidarity clause' (Article 222), probably because that would have triggered a response at the EU level. In contrast, Article 42.7 defers any response to the sphere of bilateral agreements between France and each individual European partner. But a serious reflection is in order for the future of EU solidarity in the defence and security sector. What the French precedent boils down to in effect is little more than a 'coalition of the *European* willing'.

'...regional challenges are making Europeans understand that even a 'fortress Europe' will need to act in faraway theatres.'

Turning to the migration crisis, there is broad agreement on the need to strengthen the EU's external borders – however, such borders still need to be properly recognised as *European* frontiers. The most serious refugee crisis since 1945 first triggered a continental rift between north and south, and then a rift between east and west. Meanwhile, the collective inability to uphold Schengen is doing nothing to make the external borders more secure: a textbook lose-lose scenario.

Clearly, the Schengen system was one of the EU's fair-weather policies. What we are discovering today is that the EU must be equipped for bad weather, too. The introduction of joint border controls at the EU's external frontiers is a must, as is a truly European asylum system. At the same time, the Dublin Regulation must be reformed and new arrangements with Turkey on migration flows found.

The refugee crisis has an even greater potential than the euro crisis to shatter the trust between member states and the EU. Obviously, there can only be a Europe-wide solution. And yet the deal that is needed – more responsible behaviour on the part of national governments and greater European solidarity – is an extremely difficult deal to thrash out. Europe is simply in crisis-fighting mode, behaving in a reactive way although it is clear that the origins of the migration crisis are of a deeper, structural nature.

From regional to global

It has often been said that in order to become a global power, the EU would, first and foremost, have to demonstrate serious capacities in the 'arc of crisis' along its borders. If the EU is to do so, it is going to have to combine the strength of the European nation states with the specific leverage of the EU proper. However, divisions among member states run particularly deep on issues related to the immediate neighbourhood (the dilemma over how to deal with Russia is a telling example). It may therefore actually be easier to formulate a serious EUGS than develop effective regional policies.

The EU's role is to channel national efforts in the same strategic direction, with the Union acting as a kind of 'framework' power, to serve as multiplier of the – limited – individual power of member states to influence regional trends.

Certain key elements of a regional policy remain indispensable, but the *logic* of Europe's external action must be global. Events in distant places like Afghanistan, Nigeria, Mali, Somalia, are just as relevant as the flows of migrants they produce. The irony is that regional challenges are making Europeans understand that even a 'fortress Europe' will need to act in faraway theatres. Completing this conceptual leap and turning it into coherent (and reasonably well-funded) policy choices is therefore the main priority.