

33 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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Since the adoption of the previous European Security Strategy in 2003, discussions on strategic thinking and the EU's global role have been a constant feature, though more within the think tank world than in the realms of politics and policymakers.

Although there is much speculation about its content and its implementation, there is, at last, a European Union Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) on its way. Some expect the document to be an 'all-embracing' strategy which will provide answers to almost all the vexed questions that Europe is currently confronted with (and is likely to face in the next five years or so). For others, just the unfolding of the process itself has generated much excitement.

Boosting confidence

The current discussions were initiated a few years ago by Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and his Polish counterpart Radek Sikorski. A debate ensued across Europe inviting suggestions for a new EU strategy that would effectively corre-

spond to the needs of a rapidly changing international environment while also simultaneously serving European security interests.

What emerged from these expert-driven discussions was that while there was no shortage of ideas, visions, tools and practical recommendations on ways and means to enhance and make the EU's global ambitions operational, there was a clear lack of coordination and coherence of interests and policies among the member states. This not only resulted in insufficient investments in joint European economic, political and military capabilities, but also in a loss of confidence among member states with regard to the possible role that the EU could play on the international stage.

One of the key aspects for an effective European policy in international affairs is undoubtedly confidence. Confidence is a must in a rapidly transforming and unpredictable international environment. Confidence is also of vital importance in any scenario in which the EU faces critical internal challenges, be it the threat of the UK

leaving the Union ('Brexit'), the slow and complicated policy responses to the migration crisis, the negative effects of slow economic growth or post-euro crisis disagreements. All these issues have revealed the existence of clear fault lines within the EU itself. Instead of ever closer bonds, what we are witnessing is an ever distant Union.

Confidence also is a critical factor when dealing with Europe's neighbours. It is no longer a question of whether the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is correct or efficient; it is a question of whether the EU is ca-

capable of agreeing upon and acting on the security interests and safety of its citizens and its neighbours. Europe's 'ring of friends' does not exist anymore (if it ever did), and long-term conflicts in eastern Ukraine, Syria and other places are challenges which demand decisive actions from member states. In response, the EU has to abandon its traditional habit of producing position papers and must instead seek to undertake concrete actions.

Defining interests

The effectiveness of the EUGS is to a very large extent dependent on forging an agreement among member states on the common European interests that need to be promoted and secured globally. To this end, HR/VP Frederica Mogherini has emphasised the need for a well-defined set of interests. It is noteworthy that though the EU has strongly, convincingly and consistently articulated the core values that define European foreign policy, there is a marked hesitancy on its part to define and pursue interests – viewing them instead as an old-fashioned concept tainted by selfish nation state sentiments.

Without defined and accepted interests, how-

ever, the EU is at best only a normative power which lacks the basis to extend its influence globally. While it is true that the EU's strength lies in its values which have ensured prosperity and peace within its borders and beyond for the last 60 years, these values should not remain disconnected from interests. Instead, interests ought to

be deeply rooted in values and should serve the purpose of protecting the latter.

The EUGS should also aim to put forward a new concept of resilience as a response to external and internal instability: it is

needed in the realm of European policymaking, in European societies, and also in European institutions. The term aptly encompasses the numerous challenges and the responses needed to mitigate them. At the same time, any reference to resilience which lacks a precise definition of the term (and viable indicators to measure it), is not a serious attempt to adopt new policy tools. Resilience is not only about response to challenges and the ability to return to the *status quo*. Resilience is the ability to build and accumulate resources which prevent the need to respond in the first place.

Whether or not the EUGS will be successfully implemented depends on many factors, but one of the most important is building, sustaining and enhancing partnerships. Internally, the EU's most important partnership is with its citizens. Ultimately, they are the main stakeholders of the EUGS.



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