

# 34 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

## Julianne Smith

Senior Fellow, Director of the Strategy and Statecraft Program  
Center for a New American Security

As EU officials draft the EU's Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), ambitions are no doubt running high. This is, after all, the first time since 2003 that the EU has undertaken a comprehensive examination of its current threat environment, its core objectives, and its overarching place in the world. For months, drafters and contributors in and outside of formal EU channels have been recommending ways in which the EU can enhance its impact, strengthen its capabilities, and maintain its strategic focus in the midst of a turbulent threat environment where crises seem to surface almost daily.

### Keep it simple

These are all important areas of focus. But in the face of an array of complex external threats (a historic migration crisis, the threat of terrorism, and a resurgent Russia), as well as internal challenges (the rise of anti-EU, anti-immigrant parties, the potential exit of one of its largest members, weak economies, and a loss of faith in the Union as a whole), the EUGS should focus on

two basic tasks. The first is to reaffirm – through the lens of foreign policy – the rationale behind the very existence of the European Union. The second is to issue some low-cost, high-impact initiatives that correspond to the finite resources and limited political capital the EU currently has at its disposal.

Admittedly, neither of these tasks sound particularly inspiring. But for an organisation whose future is literally hanging in the balance, the EU cannot afford to produce an EUGS that outlines lofty policy ideas which are disconnected from today's reality.

The generation that witnessed the creation and early evolution of the EU is being replaced by a group that is openly questioning the value and vitality of an institution that they increasingly see as unaccountable and unresponsive to their needs. The EUGS should open with a message that speaks directly to this scepticism with a primer on the assumptions and motivations of the founding fathers, which are worth repeating.

Where would Europe be today without such an institution? Without the treaties and decades of cooperation? Without the intelligence sharing and the joint diplomatic and military missions? Without the promise of membership that has spurred countries to undertake costly and politically charged reforms, which in turn have contributed to the spread of democracy and prosperity? Europe and the world more broadly would certainly look a lot darker.

Of course, it would be foolish to say that everything that the EU has tried to do in the area of foreign policy has been a raging success. The 2008 Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy highlighted some of the EU's foreign policy shortcomings in considerable detail. Similarly, this year's EUGS will also have to offer a clear-eyed assessment of what is *not* working. If the EU has any hope of convincing particularly younger Europeans to remain invested in the European project, it will have to acknowledge their grievances. Yes, the EU is sometimes too slow to act. Yes, the EU lacks capabilities. Yes, the EU struggles to reach consensus especially in the area of foreign and security policy.

But those admissions should be paired with a detailed description of how today's global security environment poses unique challenges for which there are no easy answers. In short, today's security environment simply has no precedent. The West faces an interconnected web of global and regional threats, whose sheer volume and complexity are overwhelming.

A vast array of actors, ranging from great powers – such as Russia and China – to non-state groups – like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) – and individuals, mix competi-

tion with cooperation across and within states, regions and the globe. The capabilities and tactics that our adversaries use to undermine our diplomatic, economic, and military advantages have also changed.

## Aim right

It is therefore imperative that in taking stock of its foreign policy capabilities, the EU put forward some realistic policy recommendations for coping with today's complex challenges. A good place to start would be in the area of resilience where the EU has both experience and capacity. And without spending billions, the EU is capable of making some new investments that could help reduce vulnerabilities and thwart adversaries.

Special emphasis should be placed on cybersecurity, border control, enhanced intelligence, and continuity of government in the face of a crisis. Resilience is smart policy for two reasons. First, investing in resilience would improve member states' ability to anticipate and resolve disruptive challenges to their critical functions. Second, pursuing a range of affordable resilience measures also happens to be a useful counter narrative to those arguing that the EU cannot provide for its citizens' security.

While the EUGS offers an opportunity to 'think big', the current fragility of the EU requires an approach that can both win over the sceptics and put forward some fresh – but politically and financially viable – ideas. The current drafters should aim to do both.

