

# 38 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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After having been perhaps the most spectacular political endeavour of the 20th century, the European Union is now beset with troubles, confounding the achievement of its internal project with its geopolitical purpose and positioning. The never-ending costs of the euro's hasty creation, as well as a multitude of external shocks, ranging from the complex power dynamics in Asia to the turmoil of the Middle East closer to home – and the resulting migration crisis – have added to the perception that the EU is in decline. Indeed, several parts of the world increasingly disregard its relevance and, sometimes gladly, watch the dwindling aura of a project that, until recently, European officials praised as a model to be pursued.

What should be the priority of an EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy? Which attitude should the Union adopt to give it the clout it deserves and that many in the world would still like it to have?

### A bolder Europe

Boldness is the key priority. This does not mean resorting to violence, nor does it imply abandoning

Europe's traditional alliance with the US, but it does mean strongly asserting a European view – even if this goes *against* US desires. It means coping with fear and being less hesitant, displaying neither shame nor excessive caution to pursue, for instance, a third way between the US and China.

This is likely to mean having a different voice within NATO, one used to wisely circumscribe its scope and actions, pursuing measures that clearly enhance European security and not those that exclusively serve North American designs.

The required boldness demands replacing the oft-rapid rhetoric of co-operation with African, Central, and South American nations – which sometimes contains post-colonial undertones – with a less-preachy one of partnership. Rather than simply espousing the niceties of the European model, real help – be it technological, educational, health or even political – could be offered by defining transparent objectives. China, India, Brazil and even Turkey's progresses in these areas, though not necessarily praised here, have largely shown that the EU's role, when not disastrous or ineffective, does not have a value differential from



them, as regards the promotion of growth and even sustainability .

But the real litmus test is Russia. The EUGS must clearly define the EU's relations with Russia, square up the existing *contentieux* and lay out plans for setting up a constructive, forward-looking agenda. Without creating a blueprint for co-operation that builds upon the (perhaps limited) common ground of their respective geo-political visions, the EU will stay in the shadow of the US and its security remain uncertain. Moreover, the Union will continue to have fuzzy limits, the stability of which will ever be deemed uncertain, adding extra internal conflicts, as members position themselves assertively and distinctly towards the 'Russian problem'.

Implementing these changes is primarily a matter of changing attitudes and traditional outlooks rather than devising new internal channels and programmes. It needs to be understood that no one is going to give the EU the latest technologies which it may need in the near future for free, nor will anybody secure it the energy and food sorely needed for tomorrow out of generosity.

Ministerial talks involving national diplomats, an innovative and more homogenous communications policy and skilful top-level diplomatic staff will all be required to boost the European External Action Service. NATO will need to be reformed: while this is not impossible, it again demands assertiveness, level-headedness and time. The security bill may increase in the short term, though not much if the Russian predicament is solved.

## The power of culture

A second, major priority also exists: better use of cul-

tural assets in security and foreign relations.

The EU has overlooked both the enormous potential and the encompassing character of its cultural assets for some time now, more often than not while seeking to appease or follow other powers.

That Europe's culture is rich is not in question; what matters is that its use to tackle a variety of issues (including even terrorism) remains undervalued. The continent has amassed deep cultural and civilizational experiences, as well as acquired many perceptions on the interactions between culture and society.

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Introducing a larger culture-based element to the EU's foreign policy means less reliance on military means (which have debatable results and often adversely affect civilians) and working more closely with different peoples, cultural leaders, political representatives and icons of the supposedly opposed factions. This is not only true on the external front, but also internally: the Union can still do more to successfully integrate disenfranchised or disadvantaged communities within its own borders.

An emboldened EU, displaying its unique personality, free from external influences and using cultural, as well as conventional tools to pursue dialogue and understanding – in the European-Westphalian tradition – can make a difference in the global order. A significant one.

