

42 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Rajendra K. Jain

Director, Europe Area Studies Programme

Jawaharlal Nehru University

The European Union is drafting its new EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) in a ‘more connected, more complex and more contested world’ and amid a growing debate and concern about the future of the European project itself.

The Lisbon Treaty and the European External Action Service (EEAS) have not exactly revolutionised European foreign and security policy. People wrongly believed that if you get the institutions right, you can get the policies right; whereas it should be the other way around. Beyond trade, the European Union has tended to be a kind of structure rather than an actor. EU foreign policy displays not only a gap between goals and means, but also a gap between rhetoric and realism. When push comes to shove, outsiders still think of key member states which demonstrate a continued reluctance to act collectively and have a marked preference for bilateralism when dealing with strategic partners.

The European Union may have many strategies and create new policy areas, but so far it has not

been able to develop a shared strategic culture. The key challenges in attempts to achieve such a culture are primarily related to coordination and the more coherent use of instruments.

Four ways forward

First, the gap is growing between normative rhetoric and performance and we live in times when norm-setting is becoming increasingly contentious due to a big disconnect in worldviews, mindsets and practical agendas. The EU thus needs to become more pragmatic and try to work together with major players in devising new sets of rules. This is especially the case in spheres where few rules presently exist. Brussels should tone down its rhetorical overreach and shed its moral grandstanding. The Union needs to be more practical and not be reticent in becoming more transactional – especially when it confronts the perennial challenge of value addition beyond trade.

Second, the EU tends to spread itself too thinly; it is constantly in search of new projects rather than completing old ones. There is growing dia-

logue fatigue with most of its strategic partners and many discussion formats are either being discontinued or lie dormant. Instead of being obsessed with the process itself, the Union needs to rationalise its resources and focus on a limited number of issues with greater prospects of tangible outcomes.

Third, visibility remains a challenge for the European Union. There is a gap in how the EU communicates and explains itself to major partners. Since perceptions do matter in cementing or hindering ties, EU policymakers must address this concern more effectively if they seek to become a player of greater consequence in Asia and elsewhere.

The Union needs to progress from information dissemination towards more proactive engagement and dialogue to improve the visibility, understanding, and perception of the EU. As a result, the Union needs to explore innovative ways of how it can better target and synergise its media, communication and public diplomacy strategies with key partners in order to enhance its visibility and overcome stereotypes and misperceptions. A crucial element of a more coherent and effective public diplomacy is to enhance the media skills of staff of EU Delegations. The European Union also needs to graduate from *ad hoc* activities in the cultural field to dedicating funds, hiring the necessary expertise, and creating an organisational template for cultural cooperation.

Fourth, there is a need to focus afresh on relations with India, especially under the new, pragmatic leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who considers the West to be an indispensable partner for the country's modernisation. It is time to stop looking for a perfect deal on the free trade agreement (FTA), but aim for a realistic

outcome which is a win-win proposition for both sides. It is also imperative for Brussels to expand its expertise on major Asian countries, including India.

A changing balance of power

‘Europe needs to be more open to learning from others; it needs to listen more and lecture less and construct a new European narrative which is more open, inclusive and accommodative.’

With the rise of the ‘Rest’, things are no longer quite what they seemed to be. Europeans have to revise their mental maps about the growing profile of emerging powers and the

gradual shift of economic power to the east. But this may not happen soon as old habits die hard – especially as Europeans have for centuries been accustomed to exerting influence. After all, at one point in time, whether a political voice was heard at all often depended on Europe.

The changing balance of power has so far not significantly affected the narrative of Europe and the discourse it has established about itself. Europeans will have to change the idea that they can continue as before without adapting, especially as their normative narrative is being increasingly contested and challenged by the emerging powers which are beginning to offer alternative, non-EU narratives.

Ultimately, Europe needs to be more open to learning from others; it needs to listen more and lecture less and construct a new European narrative which is more open, inclusive and accommodative.

