

47 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Vladimír Bilčík

Head of EU Programme

Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA)

The European Union desperately needs a boost of confidence. While an EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) can hardly become a panacea for Europe's fragility, a well-crafted and operational text could be one step towards renewing trust in the European project.

A new EUGS should provide clarity and act as a guide for Europe's international action. First and foremost, this means that external ambitions must be grounded in an increasingly dismal reality.

While in the early years of the last decade the EU flourished and the title of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) – *A secure Europe in a better world* – captured the optimism of the day, by 2005 the positivity inside the Union began to morph into something less certain.

Unsuccessful referenda in France and the Netherlands buried the constitution for the enlarged European Union. Although the Lisbon Treaty overcame the institutional conundrum, the onset of the financial and debt crises have largely defined the continent's main policy priorities and

constraints since 2009.

The EU today is internally more divided and its situation more precarious than at any other point in recent history. Terms like 'Brexit' and 'Grexit' or even mention of 'Frexit' capture the current political mood. In short, member states are principally focused on keeping the EU together rather than pursuing further integration.

Moreover, the EU's surroundings do not resemble a better world. EU enlargement is on hold. Partnership with Russia has turned into conflict with Moscow. The Eastern Partnership (EaP) now effectively involves just three countries with limited control over their respective territories (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia). And the European Union has become a contested term rather than a positive point of reference for partner countries.

Meanwhile, to the south, hopes surrounding the so-called Arab Spring have largely faded. Instead, the Union faces basic order and security problems magnified by the flows of migrants and refugees from the Middle East and Africa.

Developing the toolbox

The EUGS must therefore originate from, as well as address the current crises facing the Union. In practical terms, it should be a basis for a more reliable EU external role in three ways.

First, the EU needs a basic toolbox for communication in external relations. Whenever possible, the Union has to be able to speak with a common voice *vis-à-vis* the outside world. And while EU member states often lack a common policy towards particular countries and/or regions, they almost always possess some shared aims and priorities with regard to specific international topics.

The EUGS should thus foster better communication mechanisms and clearer EU templates for engaging with the outside world. And member states should work along shared policy goals and EU red lines. Furthermore, the Union ought to generate its own set of baselines for various foreign and security policy priorities. When faced with the potentially worsening state of the EU and its environment, a shared understanding of standards for external action is essential.

Second, any credible foreign policy needs resources. The EU's external communication will be hollow without substantive support on the ground. The EUGS should address both traditional and newer threats such as energy, cyber and information security, as well as indicate action plans for gathering realistic hard and soft means to face these challenges.

The European Union must become more resilient from within. This will be tricky as it will place ad-

ditional demands on member states and national politicians at a time when the EU itself is becoming increasingly contested across domestic political arenas.

Yet, just as EU states have recently secured additional support for the eurozone, in the face of increasing external and internal threats member

states must focus on investing in security. The EUGS could clarify the division of foreign and security policy responsibilities between the EU and its member states and thus help generate pressure for additional resource commitments. Both

EU institutions and national governments need their respective roadmaps to raise future levels of resilience.

Finally, through the EUGS, the EU should underpin its long-term external strengths such as trade policy, international economic development and development assistance. The new strategy is an opportunity to tackle crisis management issues related to EU foreign policy competencies (which are at a developmental stage at best) and focus on systematic policy planning in more traditional community areas of international relations.

In recent years the EU has gained a negative image of being rudderless both within the Union and in Europe's neighbourhood. The EUGS – a well-timed opportunity to give the Union greater purpose – must acknowledge this and learn from the mistakes of the past.



‘The EUGS should address both traditional and newer threats such as energy, cyber and information security, as well as indicate action plans for gathering realistic hard and soft means to face these challenges.’