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Facing pushback abroad and populism at home, many European foreign policy actors are becoming defeatist about values. They are tired of facing cynical counterparts who point to real or fantasy failings in our own rights protection or democratic practices. EU diplomats are also fed up with member states undermining Europe's credibility by doing side-deals that undercut common positions based on values, or even contesting long-held principles of liberal democracy.

In this period of overlapping crises and dwindling self-confidence, it may seem convenient to drop the values agenda – to ease the problems of divisions between member states (no need for consistency) and the loss of soft power (no aspirations to change other countries). The priority is to deliver results on the foreign policy side of the crises – from tackling the roots of terrorism inspired by the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) to stopping the flows of migrants.

A new *realpolitik*

It is no surprise that a new *realpolitik* has

emerged. Interests should trump values because our survival is at stake, say many politicians and officials.

The same logic runs through many issues: Russia is pushing back with propaganda, so we should remove 'irritants' (like political prisoners) from our relationships in the neighbourhood. Migrants are pressing at our frontiers, so we should lift conditions for goodies like visa liberalisation if countries promise to stop boats from leaving the shore. Populists are decrying rights and values in our domestic debates, so we should not preach to other countries. Terrorists are attacking our cities, so we should support governments that repress Islamic fundamentalism.

But this new *realpolitik* is pseudo-realism. It simplifies the challenges and assumes we can identify consistent 'European interests' in complicated situations. Moreover, it ignores three important realities about foreign policy: countries are not monoliths; many foreigners also cherish the values we hold dear; and a lack of respect for rights and freedoms does not bring long-term stability

for third parties nor does it bring security for us.

First, European capitals have been stung before by cutting deals with authoritarian governments and failing to show their populations that the EU also cared about abuses and corruption. Remember the embarrassment at revelations that European leaders had supported Ben Ali and Mubarak right up until their overthrow in 2011? EU delegations then had to invest in new relationships with a wider range of civil society to regain some credibility. Europe should not keep repeating the same mistake: alliances of convenience with governments can backfire, and non-governmental actors are increasingly important worldwide (as last June's Strategic Assessment pointed out).

Second, many people outside Europe cherish the values we call European, and many more aspire to the greater freedom and prosperity that Europeans enjoy. This remains a source of soft power because the EU gains respect when it shows what it stands for. There is no need to preach from on high. Rather, the case can be made on the basis of the European experience that well-functioning markets are underpinned by good governance and democratic practices. It is also supported by values surveys showing that Europeans have remarkably consistent views about the need to protect human rights and uphold the rule of law.

Third, a lack of respect for values does not bring long-term stability and security. The real trade-off is not between values and interests, or even security and rights. Rather, it is about the short term and long term. For example, will current repression make Egypt stable over the next ten

years? Will reliance on increasingly illegitimate regimes in the Middle East deter radicalisation, or instead encourage recruitment to ISIL and other extremist causes? Will the Balkan countries be better partners on migration, crime and terrorism if the EU abandons its aims of improving governance and rule of law there?

The need for the transformational

If EU foreign policy focuses just on the transactional and forgets about the transformational, we will not achieve security around our borders.

Short-term deals may be necessary in the current crisis,

but we should not lower the ambition for long-term change in our neighbourhood and beyond. Furthermore, the waning of the EU's gravitational pull should not jeopardise the commitment to a global order based on rules and rights, which serves our long-term interests.

The danger of this pseudo-realism is that it seems hard-headed and pragmatic while leaving some room for idealism. But there are hard interests underlying the longstanding values agenda that are not served by transactions alone.

Hopefully, the EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) will look to the longer term, beyond the current crisis of self-confidence and towards the principles that will bring security to future generations.



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