

36 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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The EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is a rare opportunity for the European Union to think strategically and to be strategic. In the foreign policy realm, the EU has developed multiple and mostly pertinent ‘policies’ or ‘strategies’, but at the very least lacks a clear strategic vision that European citizens can share (or criticise) and partners abroad can understand. How does the EU see the world? What does the EU stand for? What are its strategic interests?

As a unique and specific political entity, the EU can probably not develop a strategic document that would be similar in scope and ambition to national white papers. It should, however, work towards establishing a shared vision and a common ambition.

The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) was a first step in this regard as it spelled out a coherent set of principles, values and priorities, even though it failed to offer a strategy *per se*, as it was focused on a common narrative for the new Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). In the current process, the choice of a ‘global’ strate-

gy is a wise one as the document should cover all the tools and agencies engaged in EU’s external policies beyond those narrowly defined by CFSP and CSDP. But in addition to being global, the EUGS must be strategic as well.

An honest assessment of risks

In ‘a more connected, contested and complex world’ – to use the words of *The European Union in a changing global environment* HR/VP report of June 2015 – the first strategic challenge for the EU is to face up to the fact that its security environment and neighbourhood is no longer stable. Moreover, the opening sentences of the 2003 ESS are simply no longer relevant: ‘Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history.’

The European Union has never been confronted with such major and pressing strategic challenges before. Internally, the EU is facing major crises which threaten to undermine the very nature of

the European project. Externally, the Union's security environment has been radically transformed. For decades, the EU's neighbourhood was only composed of states aspiring to join the Union or considered to be – and described as – partners. Now, the post-Soviet space and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) form an arc of crises surrounding Europe.

With the risks and instability posed by terrorism and major wars no longer possible to ignore, this new era is challenging some of the very premises of the EU's external action.

Stabilising the Middle East and addressing

Russian President Putin's attempts to undermine the European security architecture are key tasks for the EU. These challenges have a direct impact on many EU policies and tools (*inter alia*, neighbourhood policy, border control and migration policies, counter-terrorism, crisis management) and are putting European values and principles to the test.

Developing a strategic approach to these long-term challenges is an existential endeavour for the EU, as a failure to demonstrate not only resilience but an ability to shape its own security environment could have catastrophic consequences.

Power on the world stage

The EU has stressed the importance of trade, aid and soft power as the primary tools of its external policy. It has always put the emphasis on cooperation and partnership as opposed to competition and zero-sum games. These core principles are in the EU's DNA and are in keeping with its democratic values.

However, especially in a degraded security envi-

ronment, the EU needs to learn how to make use of power. This is, of course, about hard security and defence, but military tools are likely to be insufficient if used alone. The challenge and opportunity for the EU is to think and act as a global power capable of shaping events. First of all, this requires a more strategic use of its economic might, of its financial assets, and of its massive aid budget.

This also involves admitting two simple facts and developing a common response to them: other major powers are challenging the European project and contest-

ing our values, and they stand ready to use the entire spectrum of power in this struggle. In a more contested environment, it is important and legitimate to preserve and promote our interests (which in most cases overlap with our values) on the world stage.

An ambitious strategy should therefore guide a determined EU, eager to cooperate but not naïve, peaceful but ready to use all its foreign policy and military capacities to defend its values and interests. In times of crises, the focus should naturally be on Europe's immediate neighbourhood (MENA and post-Soviet space), but a resolute EU should certainly think beyond these regions and not turn a blind eye to some of the strategic challenges coming from Africa and Asia.

In a world of great power politics, the EU cannot be a global actor if it refuses to think strategically.



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