# CRAFTING THE EU GLOBAL STRATEGY
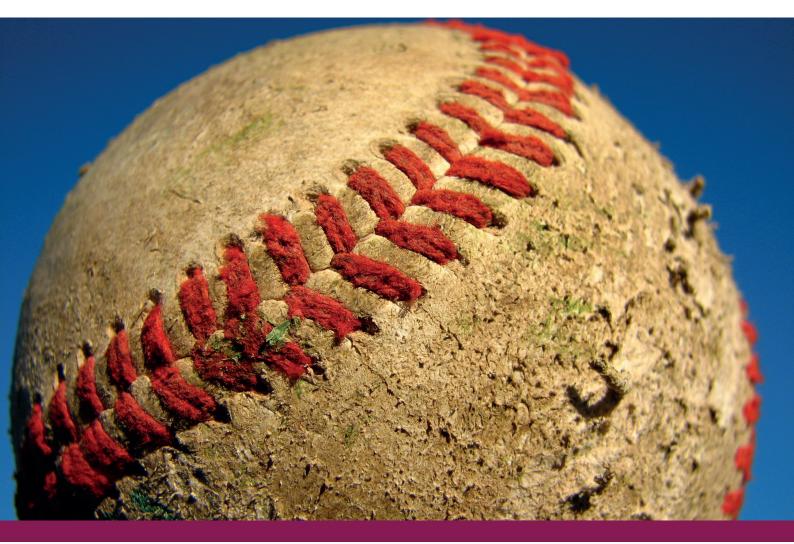
## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A STRONGER EUROPE

Kristi Raik, Niklas Helwig
& Tuomas Iso–Markku

FIIA BRIEFING PAPER 188 ▪ December 2015

# CRAFTING THE EU GLOBAL STRATEGY

## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR A STRONGER EUROPE

Kristi Raik
Senior Research Fellow
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Niklas Helwig
Senior Research Fellow
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

Tuomas Iso–Markku
Research Fellow
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

- The European Union is preparing a new global strategy on foreign and security policy, to be presented by its foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini by June 2016. The success of the new strategy will depend on its ability to regenerate commitment to a common foreign policy among member states.

- Compared to the European Security Strategy of 2003, the regional and global context is far less favourable today. The vulnerability and insecurity of today's Europe are pushing Europeans closer together.

- The EU's value-based agenda needs clear priorities. At the same time, the EU should defend European security and the norms-based global order in a manner that seeks to engage different types of regimes.

- The strategy should send a clear message that the EU's security and defence policy, in all its forms, is about providing security for the EU and its citizens. The EU is unlikely to be directly involved in the territorial defence of its member states, but it contributes to Europe's security by a variety of means, ranging from diplomacy to strengthening the defence industrial base.

- The refugee crisis is the latest, stark reminder that it is necessary to strengthen the Union as a 'comprehensive power' able to draw on a variety of tools in a flexible, goal-oriented manner.

The European Union is preparing a new strategy on foreign and security policy at a moment of uncertainty and anxiety about the future of Europe and its place in the world. Both regional and global developments are characterized by complexity and contradictory simultaneous trends. The global balance of power is shifting away from the West, raising concern about the future of the norms-based liberal world order. Democratic values have not lost their appeal across the globe, but face a broad range of challenges including rising autocratic states and brutal terrorist groups.

The European security order is being shattered by violations of its core norms by Russia, but this also serves to highlight the value of these norms and of the EU's commitment to them, especially for Russia's immediate neighbours. Further deepening of European integration continues in the framework of the eurozone, but the Union is increasingly fragmented, with the primary locus of power lying firmly on the national level due to a mix of crisis dynamics, the self-serving agendas of national elites and sceptical populations.

In such tense circumstances, in June 2015 member states mandated High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini to submit an EU global strategy on foreign and security policy by June 2016. The need to update the European Security Strategy (ESS), dating from 2003, had been acknowledged for several years, but this task was not undertaken by Mogherini's predecessor, Catherine Ashton, during her term in 2009-2014. Many member states remain suspicious about the potential of a new strategy to reinvigorate EU foreign policy. There are fears that the strategy debate will expose disagreements instead of creating more unity. Yet the need for Europe to cohere and actively defend its interests on the global stage is stronger than ever.

The strategy will draw on a broad process of consultations and debates across Europe, involving member states and other relevant actors.[1] This paper seeks to make a contribution to the debate by highlighting three key issues that need to be addressed in the strategy, and which are the Union's potential strengths as a foreign policy actor. These issues are by no means exhaustive, but can serve as building blocks for establishing common ground. The approach taken is thematic rather than regional, so as to underscore that the strategy should provide a shared basis for dealing with specific issues, regions and countries.

First, the paper proposes clear priorities for the EU's value-based agenda and calls for a more realistic approach to reconciling values and interests in order for Europe to be able to shape the future global order. Second, it is argued that the strategy should send a clear message that the EU's security and defence policy, in all its forms, is about providing security for the EU and its citizens. Finally, the paper argues that a 'global reflex' across all EU institutions is needed to strengthen the Union as a 'comprehensive power' able to draw on a variety of tools in a flexible, goal-oriented manner.

## The conundrum of values, interests and global order

The ideal of a normative, value-based European foreign policy emerged in the context of the post-Cold War expectations, echoed in the ESS, about the global spread of democracy and the rule of law. In today's world, democracy is indeed the preferred system of government for 80 per cent of people.[2] Nevertheless, the global condition of political rights and freedoms has constantly declined since 2005.[3] Core European values have universal appeal among citizens, but they are not universally shared at the level of states.

The EU's efforts at promoting democracy and human rights abroad have had little success, particularly in its own neighbourhood. Many autocracies, including China and Russia, are internationally assertive and currently face no major challenge from their

---

1  The process was launched with a strategic review paper presented by Mogherini in June 2015, 'The European Union in a changing global environment', http://eeas.europa.eu/docs/strategic_review/eu-strategic-review_strategic_review_en.pdf.

2  Richard Youngs, *The Puzzle of Non-Western Democracy*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015, p. 20, referring to World Values Survey, http://www.worldvalues-survey.org/wvsonline.jsp.

3  Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World 2015', https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-2015/discarding-democracy-return-iron-fist.

own citizens. At the same time, democracy is being tested by illiberal currents and socio-economic hardship in the West. These processes are coinciding with systemic change in the global order, which increases the risk of instability and conflict. The rising non-Western powers are seen as at least a potential threat to the liberal world order.

Against this backdrop, the role of values and norms in EU foreign policy deserves an honest re-assessment. A shift towards a more interest-oriented approach has been discernible in recent debates on the EU's external affairs, including its neighbourhood policy.[4] The earlier idealism should not be replaced with cynicism, relativism or even realism in the sense of accepting that hard power ultimately dominates the liberal aspiration for a norms-based international order. But the EU needs to be more realistic (as distinct from realist), not least for the sake of its credibility.

The new strategy should define clear priorities for the value-based agenda. First, Europe will cease to be what it is unless it defends its values at home, be it against illiberal trends, or for the humane treatment of refugees. Second, the EU should do more to support home-grown democratization efforts abroad, for instance in Ukraine and Tunisia, with both having significance beyond their borders. Furthermore, it is both a value-based choice and a strategic interest to cherish privileged relations with states and other actors that do share the same values, starting from the unique relationship with the US. In all these areas, there is hard work ahead.

Beyond that, one moves to the more controversial sphere of relations with non-democratic states. The ESS needs to be reviewed, reflecting on two critical linkages: between values and security, and between domestic political systems and international relations. There is no shortage of analyses on tensions between values (usually defined as democracy and human rights) and interests (security, stability and economic interests) in European foreign policy. In practice, it is hard to envisage a foreign policy where

security interests would never gain priority over value considerations. It has been commonplace in post-Cold War Western security strategies, including the ESS, to assume in the spirit of Immanuel Kant that a more democratic world would be a more secure and peaceful one. Yet how exactly and in what direction the interconnection between peace and democracy functions is contested among academics. Peace is not just a feature of relations between democracies, but also a precondition for democracy to take root.

A more realistic approach admits that democratization, or the lack thereof, primarily depends on domestic conditions. The EU can and should try to foster favourable conditions, but it is not able to turn autocracies into democracies. It needs to deal with the existing regimes, whether it likes them or not. The EU, just like other Western actors, in many cases pursues cooperation with non-democracies because of strategic interests. These choices should not be disguised as value-oriented. Warming up ties with Belarus or Iran is motivated above all by security interests, and it happens in spite of the lack of significant positive developments in the field of democracy and human rights in these countries.

Careful thinking about red lines is still necessary. Non-democracies cannot get as deep and close in their relationship with the EU as democratic countries. For instance, cooperation on migration with an increasingly authoritarian Turkey is necessary, but promising a faster enlargement process in return crosses the red line of values as a condition for membership.

Assuming that in the foreseeable future the international system includes both major democracies and major autocracies, and that the balance between them may be shifting in favour of the latter (which is by no means certain in the longer term), perhaps the most difficult challenge for European foreign policy is to shape a norms-based global order – even more, to defend the very idea of having a norms-based order – in a manner that seeks to engage different types of regimes. Having different political systems at home does not preclude the possibility of agreeing on shared norms of international conduct. Western-born concepts of democracy and human rights have an important place in the liberal world order, but it is also worth remembering that the post-WWII order was created and sustained for decades among states that were ideological rivals.

---

4    European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, 'Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy', Brussels, 18 November 2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/enp/documents/2015/151118_joint-communication_review-of-the-enp_en.pdf.

Regionally, Europe's commitment to a norms-based order is overshadowed by Russia, which currently shows little interest in a cooperative, norms-based relationship – unless the European security order is fundamentally re-defined pursuing the logic of spheres of influence. Efforts to cooperate in the Middle East cannot undo the deep disagreements. The EU should avoid illusions about short-term gains and stand firm on the core principles of the existing European security architecture. This does not mean abandoning the longer-term goal of reinforcing a security order in which Russia is committed to shared norms. In this context, China is not merely a source of economic opportunities and regional security challenges, but a partner that shares with the EU a strategic interest in stability in Europe.[5]

### Providing security for the EU and its citizens

The EU is currently surrounded by several violent conflicts, including the ones in Eastern Ukraine, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Despite the fact that the volatile state of the neighbourhood presents a significant security challenge to the EU, it remains largely unclear what role security and defence policy in general and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) in particular will play in the Union's response to the instability around it. The actions that the EU has taken in the framework of the CSDP during the last year and a half – launching a naval operation to combat human trafficking in the Mediterranean and deploying an EU advisory mission for civilian security sector reform in Ukraine – hardly amount to an exhaustive, or satisfactory, answer.

This is not to say that the current crises in the EU's neighbourhood could or should be solved by military means. However, the crises, ranging from the Russian aggression in Ukraine to the highly complex war in Syria, should spur the EU and the member states to think deeply about what the EU should do, and be able to do, in the area of security and defence, both at present and in the future.

To date, this is far from clear. The uncertainty surrounding the purpose of the EU's security and defence policy is, to a large extent, intentional. From the very beginning, the nature of the EU's security and defence policy has been defined in ambiguous terms because vague formulations have allowed the Union to overcome existing divisions between the member states while, at the same time, leaving the door open for pursuing more ambitious objectives in the future. Thus, the EU treaties envisage a European Union whose members defend each other and might even build a common defence. However, in practice, the EU's security and defence policy has been geared almost exclusively towards crisis management, focussing on civilian and military operations outside the EU territory and the identification of the necessary capabilities for such operations.[6]

However, this model seems to have reached its limits. Throughout its short history, the CSDP has been hampered by the divergent views and limited military capabilities of the member states, meaning that its usefulness has varied from case to case. But during the last few years, the challenges facing the CSDP have grown even bigger.

First of all, there is a sense of intervention fatigue, caused by the mixed (Afghanistan) or disastrous (Iraq and Libya) results of some of the most recent Western-led military interventions. Secondly, austerity has compelled most member states to limit their defence spending, making them both less able and, above all, less willing to contribute to international crisis management. And thirdly, Russia's annexation of Crimea and its assertive posture have pushed many member states to concentrate on territorial defence and turn their attention towards NATO. As a consequence of these trends, most of the recent CSDP operations have been limited in size and ambition, which has served to further strengthen the image of the CSDP as a largely ineffectual tool – and of the EU as a secondary security actor.[7]

---

5    As argued by Peter van Ham, 'China can manage and even put a lid on Russia's rising pugnaciousness'. Van Ham, 'The BRICS as an EU Security Challenge', Clingendael Report, September 2015.

6    On the ambiguous nature of the CSDP, see Stephan Keukeleire & Tom Delreux (2014) *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 172–175.

7    For similar arguments, see Nicolai van Ondarza & Marco Overhaus (2014) *The CSDP after the December Summit*, SWP Comment 7.

These developments have not gone unnoticed in Brussels or the national capitals. As early as December 2013, before the start of the conflict in Ukraine, the European Council came together to discuss ways to reinvigorate the EU's security and defence policy. Apart from adopting several technical proposals designed to improve the functioning of the CSDP, they also sought to highlight the EU's value as a facilitator of cost-saving defence cooperation and as a reformer of Europe's defence industry and market. The decisions of the defence summit went some way towards responding to the most pressing concerns of the member states in the context of the economic crisis and austerity. However, the summit failed to give the EU's security and defence policy the kind of overall sense of purpose that would be needed to rekindle the member states' interest in it and to justify it in the eyes of the EU citizens.

It would most likely be too much to ask of the EU global strategy to instil such an overall sense of purpose into the EU's security and defence policy. However, the strategy should serve as one step in the process of constructing it. With this in mind, the strategy should emphasise that the EU's security and defence policy, in all its forms, is about providing security for the EU and its citizens.

The EU is unlikely to be directly involved in the territorial defence of its member states; that is and will likely remain the task of NATO and/or the member states themselves. However, the strategy should make the EU's contribution to providing security for and defending its citizens more explicit and more visible. To start with, this contribution comprises the EU's role as a diplomatic actor with global reach, the Union's efforts to enhance practical cooperation in the development of civilian and military capabilities, as well as its attempts to reorganize and strengthen Europe's defence industrial base. In addition, the strategy should underline the EU's role as a security community, which was recently highlighted by the decision to activate the mutual assistance clause in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in Paris.

Providing security for the EU and its citizens should also be the guiding principle of the Union's crisis management policy. This means that the CSDP operations should clearly focus on the EU's neighbourhood (including the 'neighbours of the neighbours') and that the ability of the individual

operations to positively impact the EU's own security environment should be the decisive factor when the Union decides upon its involvement. Of course, sometimes the link to European security will be more indirect: due to the importance that the EU traditionally attaches to multilateral institutions as cornerstones of the global order, contributions to UN-initiated operations should also be regarded as fulfilling these criteria. The same goes for operations that support important regional organizations, such as the African Union.

Finally, the CSDP will mostly not serve as a stand-alone policy. Instead, the EU's strengths are to be found in its ability to combine different policy instruments – something many other actors involved in international crisis management lack. The EU global strategy should thus also seek to define the place of the CSDP in the broader framework of EU external action. At the same time, a more detailed EU White Book could translate the general security and defence policy guidelines into more concrete capability requirements.

**Comprehensive power Europe**

The new EU global strategy is the first of its kind after the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The treaty offered new opportunities, as it established the European External Action Service (EEAS) and assigned a coordination role for all matters of external relations to the High Representative. The 2003 European Security Strategy had already underlined the need for a "more coherent" EU foreign policy, but had to mostly limit itself to traditional foreign and security policy means.

The conditions are now much more favourable, as the new institutional framework allows the new strategy to consider economic cooperation instruments and EU domestic policies with external effects as well. A much-needed step, as challenges such as the refugee crisis, pandemics, or climate change need to be tackled not just from a foreign and security policy angle, but also have a development, health or energy policy dimension.

It is only logical that the new EU global strategy should emphasize a comprehensive approach to EU external action. The term 'comprehensive approach' emerged in EU foreign policy with regard to crisis

management.[8] In that context, EU instruments should cover all stages of the cycle of a conflict or other external crisis, such as early warning capabilities, conflict prevention, CSDP missions and long-term development cooperation programmes.

The current refugee crisis highlights the case for applying the comprehensive approach to broader challenges for Europe. The generational challenge of the refugee crisis can just be managed by combining different EU and member state instruments. The development of a common policy on asylum can help ensure a fair and acceptable distribution of refugees across Europe. New European capabilities for border management can contribute towards keeping illegal migration in check. Coordinated diplomatic efforts with transit countries, such as Turkey, can ensure that conditions and perspectives for refugees improve there and that an orderly and safe passage to Europe is possible for them. In the long term, civilian or military CSDP instruments might be needed to ensure stability in post-war Syria. Only by treating these measures as a comprehensive package can the EU effectively address the refugee challenge.

The institutional dimension of incoherence has mostly been addressed with the Lisbon Treaty. The political Common Foreign and Security Policy of the Council and the often technocratic external action of the Commission are now more closely intertwined than ever. But the political problem of incoherence remained. Acting in a coherent way always involves political decisions. Policies can only be coherent when they follow a common goal. In the refugee crisis, the EU should achieve coherence towards what end? Towards eradication of poverty in the countries of origin, better security at home, respect for human rights and protecting the right of asylum? As the heated discussions around this crisis show, these different objectives are not always perceived as compatible. The strategy cannot solve the political problem of incoherence once and for all. The comprehensive approach tries instead to tackle the problem of incoherence from a more goal-oriented perspective.

Ultimately, the success of the comprehensive approach will depend on how it is implemented in each case. Yet the strategy can set the basic parameters with which effective coordination can be achieved. Mogherini's evaluation report to the June European Council names important objectives. For example, the different instruments of the EU can be used in a more flexible manner to react to swift changes on the ground. Development and other external financial instruments are a case in point, as funding and reporting efforts follow long-term cycles and are subject to bureaucratic auditing mechanisms. The system is slow to react to changing political circumstances on the ground, where at times EU delegations cannot activate funds swiftly. Sometimes a lack of capabilities is also a source of insufficiencies regarding an encompassing EU approach, as the absent EU military resources in the area of the CSDP illustrate.

By highlighting the comprehensive approach, the strategy can make a positive case for EU foreign policy. For once, the EU has an advantage over its member states' foreign policies, which often fail to be comprehensive as well. The EU's capacity to combine a wide range of policy instruments for tailor-made answers to global challenges is unmatched in the member states, especially as some of the instruments including trade and enlargement are exclusive EU policies.

Institutional innovations to ensure coordination, such as the EEAS or a Commissioner group on external relations chaired by the EU foreign policy chief, do not exist in most of the member state capitals, where politics is plagued by the same problems of conflicting objectives or organizational rivalries between ministries. The EU is very well positioned to achieve more comprehensiveness in dealing with its outside world.

However, in order to become a truly comprehensive power, the EU institutions have to start to think like international players. The increasing numbers of national diplomats in the EEAS might already help to slowly develop a geostrategic outlook in Brussels. Still, examples point in a different direction and some observers have argued that the Commission's technocratic approach to Eastern Partnership countries failed to take into account the political tensions at play in the shared neighbourhood with Russia, thus 'sleep walking' the EU into the Ukraine

---

8    European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Policy, 'The EU's comprehensive approach to external conflict and crises', Brussels, 11 December 2013, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/statements/docs/2013/131211_03_en.pdf.

crisis.[9] In addition, the Commission has struggled to consider the external effects of its actions. The EU's internal decisions in areas such as agriculture, justice and home affairs or the single market are felt outside EU borders. Large parts of the Commission lack an organizational culture that would duly reflect that its actions are having external implications, intended or otherwise. A 'global reflex', an imperative to think about the external opportunities and consequences of all Commission policies, needs to be developed if the EU is to strive for more comprehensiveness. The strategy process might be a step in that direction.

### Conclusion

The EU needs a new foreign and security policy strategy in order to remain a global actor that matters, both for its own citizens, member states and outsiders. The strategy should identify broad common principles and goals that could withstand the internal disagreements and external shocks that will inevitably emerge also in the coming years.

The strategy debate thus far has highlighted that, compared to the context of the European Security Strategy of 2003, the international context is far less favourable today. The vulnerability and insecurity of today's Europe are pushing Europeans closer together, but they are also provoking the rise of an introverted, Eurosceptic and xenophobic brand of nationalism. The eurozone and refugee crises have fed such trends and exposed serious divisions among member states.

It remains to be seen whether the divisions will push the EU's foreign policy elites to take a decisive and innovative leap forward. In 2003, the ESS was instrumental in helping European foreign policy to overcome a dramatic division over the war in Iraq, which might have caused long-term damage. Likewise, a key measure of success for the new strategy will be its ability to re-generate trust and commitment to a common foreign policy among member states and other actors in the field.

---

9    House of Lords, 'The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine', London, 20 February 2015, http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201415/ldselect/ldeucom/115/115.pdf.