
DISCUSSION PAPER

A Global Strategy for a soul-searching European Union

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One year after being tasked by European Union (EU) leaders to prepare an EU global strategy on foreign and security policy, High Representative Federica Mogherini presented the paper at the European Council on 28 June. Nobody would have thought, back in June 2015, that the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) would be delivered only a few days after the UK voting to leave the Union – a political tsunami that is shaking the foundations of European integration.

Foreign policy strategies are the product of the intersection between domestic politics and the international environment. They express the values, interests and priorities of the political actors adopting them and outline how to advance these goals on the global stage. This requires aligning means and ends as well as offering organising principles that can frame external action across a wide policy spectrum.

The new EUGS makes no exception: the internal and external contexts of its elaboration are crucial to assess its main rationale, features, added value and prospects. In the case of the EU, the domestic context needs consideration at two levels. Looking at the level of EU politics, the cohesion of the Union is under unprecedented strain. The Brexit vote is the culmination of a series of interrelated crises that have deepened political polarisation within and between member states and engendered huge uncertainty about the future of Europe. On another level, given that EU foreign policy is the product of intergovernmental negotiations and inter-institutional processes, its institutional foundations are a critical enabler of effective external action. The Lisbon Treaty has introduced reforms directed to provide more leadership, continuity and coherence to EU foreign policy but disconnects between EU bodies and little ownership by member states continue to affect the Union's international role.

As to the international context, the review of the global environment presented by High Representative Mogherini in June 2015 noted that over the previous decade or so "the world – and our perception of it – has become more dangerous, divided and disorienting...more connected but also more contested; more integrated but also more fragmented: it is much more complex." In other words, EU foreign policy unfolds in a much less permissive and more unstable environment than at the time of the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) back in 2003.

The EUGS aims to provide strategic coordinates for European foreign policy in the midst of political turmoil. The paper recalibrates the overall foreign policy posture of the EU. It sketches out a more modest and more concrete approach compared to earlier aspirations, and a more joined-up one compared to current

practice. By doing so, the strategy seeks to square the circle between the need for Europe to be cohesive and purposeful in a harder strategic environment and the fact that contested politics within the Union constrain its external action and drain its attractiveness. The EUGS calls on the EU and member states to fully take on their responsibility to underpin unity, prosperity and security at home by taking more effective and joined-up action abroad. The question is, of course, whether this call will be heeded.

What the strategy says

The strategy's recognition that challenges to Europe's international role and profile come from within as much as from without marks an important change of perspective. The EUGS plainly recognises that "We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat." In her foreword, Mogherini underscores that "The purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned." However, she also states that "This is no time for uncertainty: our Union needs a Strategy." The EUGS stresses the need for a "stronger Europe." It is therefore against the background of external *and* internal crises that the strategy calls for renewed ambition. According to Mogherini: "We need a shared vision, and common action."

Unusually for a foreign policy strategy, the EUGS does not start with an assessment of the threats and opportunities facing Europe in the world. The reason is that this assessment was at the core of the review of Europe's strategic landscape presented by the High Representative in June 2015. That paper described a world that is becoming more connected and more contested at the same time, and hence more complex, and defined five broad sets of challenges and opportunities for the EU. These included redoubling the EU's commitment to European neighbours to the East and dealing with Russia; rethinking the EU's approach to an increasingly unstable Middle East and North Africa; redefining Europe's relationship with Africa; reviving Atlantic partnerships and playing a fully-fledged role in Asia. The interests and priority areas fleshed out in the EUGS are largely consistent with the main tenets of the earlier review.

The first part of the new strategy outlines the interests of the EU's citizens that the EUGS aims to promote – peace and security, prosperity, democracy, and a rules-based global order. The paper states that "Our interest and values go hand in hand." It goes on to outline the guiding principles of EU external action, which stem "as much from a realistic assessment of the strategic environment as from an idealistic aspiration to advance a better world." Hence the indication of "principled pragmatism" as the North Star of EU global action, to be pursued through unity ("no clash between national and European interests"), engagement (to "co-shape" global rules and manage interdependence), responsibility (to tackle crises and conflicts) and partnership (to share responsibilities).

The third part of the EUGS is dedicated to the priorities of external action. The first one is the security of the Union, with a series of commitments to invest in Europe's defence both with a view to pursue "strategic autonomy" and as a condition to support the transatlantic partnership with the US. Counter-terrorism, cyber security and energy security are among the other areas for action, which all share strong links between internal and external security.

A second priority consists of strengthening state and societal resilience in the extended neighbourhood of the EU, from Central Asia to Central Africa, through tailored-made and bottom-up approaches and with a special focus on migration policies. Thirdly, the EUGS lays out the key dimensions of an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, which has to be multi-dimensional (all relevant policies), multi-phased (across all stages of conflict), multi-level (from local to global), and multilateral. In dealing with conflicts, the EU will concentrate its efforts in the surrounding regions to the East and the South, "while considering engagement further afield on a case by case basis."

The fourth priority identified by the strategy is backing cooperative regional orders, since "regions represent critical spaces of governance in a de-centred world." With reference to the European security order, the EUGS outlines a two-pronged approach to Russia, consisting of upholding rules and rights against their

violation by Russia while pursuing "selective engagement" with Moscow where interests converge. In the case of Asia, the focus is on economic diplomacy *vis-à-vis* China, Japan and India alongside engagement with ASEAN, but the strategy also calls for scaling up Europe's security role in the region.

As to the fifth priority – global governance – the EUGS argues for a proactive EU approach to "transform" and not just preserve the current system, both deepening (trade) and widening (in security and human rights matters) the reach of international rules and regimes and developing new ones (cyber, space, energy, health, new technologies). Partnering with all sorts of actors will be required to deliver on these goals.

The fourth and last part of the EUGS presents how the EU intends to fulfil its objectives by investing in a credible, responsive and joined-up Union. Credibility starts at home and is predicated not only on soft power but also on a serious commitment to security and defence. "For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand", says Mogherini in her foreword. "Member States will need to move towards defence cooperation as the norm", says the EUGS. A responsive Union should be a more rapid and flexible one in carrying out diplomacy, crisis management and development, while benefiting from an adequate knowledge base, particularly in EU delegations. Joined-up external action is called for in areas such as economic diplomacy, migration, security and development as well as concerning cross-boundary threats like terrorism.

The concluding section of the EUGS includes important pointers for its implementation. For one, the paper announces the revision of existing sectoral strategies and the implementation of new ones, in line with the EUGS' priorities. For another, it envisages that the strategy will undergo periodic review (in consultation with the Council, the Commission and the European Parliament) and that a new process of strategic reflection will be launched when the EU and its member states deem it necessary.

The main message: first things first

Strategy making at EU level is inherently a balancing act between the perceptions and priorities of different state actors and other constituencies. That said, standing back from the 60 pages of the EUGS, a key message stands out. This is a rough-weather strategy directed to uphold the security and prosperity of Europeans. In the midst of political crisis, the Union cannot afford to turn inwards but EU foreign policy has to deliver first and foremost for EU citizens.

This overall direction may not come across as particularly surprising, as national security and prosperity are the central purposes of any national foreign policy strategy. However, it is a relatively recent, emerging orientation for EU foreign policy, after an emphasis on the influence of the Union as a 'normative' or 'transformative' power in the 2000s, when the European project, and order, was not considered threatened.

The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) was arguably a more nuanced document than some of the narratives that preceded, or have built on, it. At its core, however, the ESS was about a confident Europe projecting stability and values upon others in a relatively benign international environment. The essence of the 2016 EUGS is about protecting and promoting Europe's interests, and values, in the face of mounting external and internal challenges. While the EUGS is much longer than the ESS, it is telling that the word 'interests' recurs 36 times in the former (foreword + full text) and only three times in the latter. It is equally revealing of their different focus, and of the lingering concern with growing popular dissatisfaction with the EU, that the EUGS refers 30 times to EU 'citizens' (their interests, security and needs), whereas they were mentioned just three times in the ESS.

In other words, the so-called 'new normal' – a tougher geopolitical environment alongside contested politics at home – is 'normalising' EU foreign policy. If this underlying trend is (and has been for some time) unmistakable, however, it should not be overemphasised either. It is more a difference of degree and discourse than a Copernican tuning point. For one, Europeans have always been quite alert to their interests and not necessarily driven by idealistic zeal. Witness the transactional approach with authoritarian regimes in the Arab world when suitable for member states, the pragmatic turn to bilateralism when multilateralism

does not deliver, like on trade, or accusations from the developing world of one-way exports of norms and rules with little consultation.

Additionally, the EUGS approach is more sobering than realist.¹ In other words, the strategy does not swing from an excessive reliance on the power of the rules to the sheer recognition of the rule of power in an anarchic world. In fact, High Representative Mogherini says in her foreword that "we will invest in win-win solutions and move beyond the illusion that international politics can be a zero-sum game." Two levels of assessment should be distinguished here. On one level, zero-sum politics are often practiced in international relations. Some note that geopolitical calculations are increasingly informing geo-economic competition, as opposed to economic exchanges softening geopolitical rivalry.² The problem is that, in a deeply interconnected world, zero-sum calculations can easily turn into a lose-lose scenario. On another level, the fact that there has been a revival of zero-sum politics does not mean that an actor like the EU should simply accept this trend. The EU should be robust enough to withstand competition or antagonism, and seek ways of setting international affairs on more cooperative grounds.³ This seems to be the direction taken by the EUGS.

The strategy advocates a sensible, realistic approach to EU foreign policy, conscious of the Union's (political and material) limits but also of the fact that the world is as competitive as it is interdependent and of the need to preserve some consistency between utilitarian behaviour and the values defining Europe. In particular, the strategy stresses time and again that fulfilling Europe's interests depends on the resilience of states and societies in the neighbourhood, on fostering human security beyond Europe and on supporting rules-based regional and global governance, which also involves meeting the Sustainable Development Goals. The EUGS emphasises that Europeans must take more responsibility for their security through a variety of measures and by boosting Europe's defence policy and capabilities. However, it does not endorse an outlook mainly predicated on geopolitical rivalries and frictions.

When considering the conveniently broad organising principle of "principled pragmatism", the main emphasis throughout much of the document goes on the noun. At the same time, the new strategy states upfront that "Our interests and values go hand in hand." At a very general level any foreign policy broadly reflects the core values of the actor that carries it out, whether liberal principles, national identities or South-South solidarity. It is also surely in the interest of the EU to promote its values on the international stage. However, the EUGS should have been more forthcoming in recognising the dilemmas that are part of the relationship between interests and values. For example, the 2015 US National Security Strategy (NSS) grapples with the same tension between normative aspirations and the pursuit of specific interests. While considering values a strong component of American leadership, however, the NSS acknowledges that competing priorities require "hard choices." It also underlines that upholding values at home is a necessary condition for promoting them abroad.⁴ For its part, the EUGS recalls that the EU's external credibility and influence will be determined by living up to its values at home, by the quality of democracy in Europe and by respecting European and international law in all spheres. Yet again, a tall order considering recent tensions and trade-offs when, for example, dealing with the refugee and migrant flows.

The EUGS does an overall good job in offering a 'reformist' strategic approach to cope with the 'revolution' of many of the assumptions that had backed EU foreign policy in the past, namely that the EU values and model of integration would be a reference for its neighbours and for international cooperation at large. In particular, it makes Europe's citizens the central beneficiaries of EU's external action. The new strategy strives to keep the bar of EU foreign policy steady in the face of much stronger winds, while recognising that the crew is unhappy (internal political crisis), the hull needs fixing (institutional system and capabilities) and the aspirational surface of the sails needs reducing or the ship could capsize.

The coordinates of the strategic compass

A foreign policy strategy needs to make sense of the multifarious complexity of the international system and distil the main coordinates for external action. This requires political choices, conceptual framing and

guidance for policy-making down the line. The EUGS covers an impressive amount of ground. It is a (sometimes very) dense document, rich with policy pointers and featuring a well-calibrated mix of continuity and innovation. It builds on the EU experience, seeks to play to its strengths, and argues for devising new approaches, or upgrade existing ones, to cope with a more complex and fragile environment. Key strategic coordinates include the following.

Securing Europe

The EUGS shows a new sense of urgency when it comes to ensuring European security. It frames this priority as one including interconnected internal and external dimensions. As the paper says, "The EU Global Strategy starts at home." Since many challenges ignore borders, developing a seamless approach that overcomes internal-external policy divides is a basic strategic coordinate for action.

The strategy makes clear that Europe's security depends on developments and conditions beyond its borders, notably in regions surrounding Europe. This requires European engagement, not retrenchment. However, there is a marked shift in emphasis from crisis management interventions abroad (so far, the core business of the Common Security and Defence Policy – CSDP) towards protecting Europe against both external threats and those spanning frontiers, such as terrorism and hybrid threats. There is a more acute awareness of the vulnerability of Europe, which serves as the basis for indicating a number of measures and initiatives encompassing defence, counter-terrorism, cyber security, energy security and strategic communications.

The paper recalls commitments to mutual assistance and solidarity among member states and, in line with the emphasis on challenges cutting across borders, advocates tighter links between external action and the area of freedom, security and justice. One example consists of cooperation between CSDP missions, the envisaged European Border and Coast Guard and other EU specialised agencies for border protection and maritime security.

The sections concerning security and defence feature a renewed level of ambition. The paper stresses that Europeans must take more responsibility for their security and be ready to deter, respond to and protect themselves from external threats. In particular, the EUGS states the goal of achieving "strategic autonomy", namely the capacity of the EU to undertake military action on its own or in cooperation with NATO. The strategy does not question the sovereignty of member states in defence matters but rightly underscores the inadequacy of disparate national defence planning cycles to deliver the capabilities needed for Europe's defence. Instead, the paper codifies and endorses a number of proposals currently on the table to foster cooperation among member states in procuring capabilities, deliver EU funding for defence research, support the European technological and industrial base and establish better operational structures to plan and conduct operations under the CSDP. Plus, the EUGS envisages follow-up action through a sectoral strategy defining "the civil-military level of ambition, tasks, requirements and capability priorities" for the EU.

The poor track record of the last decade and current EU politics give ground for scepticism on prospects for significant progress towards "strategic autonomy."⁵ Member states have entered into many commitments in the past but not fulfilled them.⁶ The fact that, after years of sometimes drastic decline, defence budgets are up again in 2016 in the majority of EU countries and further rises are expected in coming years may point to a new pattern. A Franco-German paper published on the same day as the EUGS calls for a European Security Compact, including the establishment of a "European semester" on defence capabilities – a process to regularly review national defence spending. So far, however, budget increases are modest and, more importantly, multinational cooperation on procurement remains limited and fragmented.

A related and critical question is for what Europeans are willing to use military means. Territorial defence is back, essentially through NATO, and the security of the EU external borders is a growing priority, including the maritime dimension. When it comes to external interventions, the EUGS does not offer much guidance. It calls for the EU to be able to play a more effective role in stabilisation and peacebuilding

operations, notably in supporting peace agreements and providing capacity building. Beyond ongoing operational commitments, however, Europeans do not seem to have much appetite for joining forces and deploying troops in highly unstable environments, where a foreign presence could become the target of different armed factions and terrorist groups.

A focus on the extended neighbourhood

The new strategy deliberately avoids a geographical approach of breaking down objectives and instruments per global regions. It adopts a functional approach, laying out key priorities and how to achieve them. However, the 2003 ESS finding that "Even in an era of globalisation, geography is still important" reads all the more relevant today.

The EUGS confirms the EU's strategic focus on its neighbourhood and surrounding regions, stretching the definition of this area from Central Asia to Central Africa. "We will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield." This is the large strategic space where efforts to improve societal and state resilience and to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and crises are supposed to concentrate.

When defining priorities for supporting regional orders, the European security order and the Middle East and North Africa clearly come first. Following Russia's violation of international norms, the annexation of Crimea and the destabilisation of Ukraine, the paper warns that "peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given." As reported above, the EUGS seeks to strike a balanced approach to the fraught relationship with Russia, stressing serious differences while recognising the need for dialogue and cooperation. The EU should stand united in defence of international norms – whose respect is the premise for "substantial changes" in relations with Russia – and consider "selective engagement" with Moscow where interests meet. Concerning the Middle East, among many other issues, the strategy uses rather prudent language on the difficult relationship with Turkey, calling for deepening sectoral cooperation while striving to anchor Turkish democracy and pursuing the accession process, based on related conditions. Further afield, the EUGS calls for pursuing "balanced engagement" in the volatile Gulf region, including cooperation with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries as well as gradual engagement with Iran in various sectors.

The gravest security challenges that the EU faces originate in the regions surrounding it, and the Union needs to raise its game to deal with them. However, the strategy does not seem to subscribe to the idea of 'regional power' Europe. For example, it calls for a more political approach to Asia, which includes contributing to Asian security alongside the currently prevalent focus on economic diplomacy, and it envisages a major role for Europe in reinforcing and expanding a rules-based global order as well as a "global maritime security provider."

In other words, the EUGS looks at the distinction between 'regional power' and 'global power' Europe not as an alternative but as a continuum. Along this continuum, what changes is the spectrum, or intensity, of Europe's responsibility and engagement. In their extended neighbourhood, the EU and its member states should be prepared to perform as full-fledged partners and security providers. Further away, the EU should foster partnerships, connections and reforms on a range of issues but would play a selective and non-principal role in regional geopolitics and security affairs. On the global stage, the EU can make an important difference by investing in global governance. The picture that emerges is one of a multi-regional power with global presence and outreach.

In practice, given Europe's finite resources, political context and geopolitical location, it is likely that much of the EU's bandwidth will continue to be absorbed by its neighbourhood. Beyond that, a critical condition for Europe to punch its weight will be that member states better coordinate their own bilateral relationships with key actors, such as with China. The recent Communication including elements for a new EU strategy towards China highlights many opportunities for reciprocal benefits and closer cooperation but also strikes a harder tone than previous documents in defence of Europe's economic interests within the partnership.⁷ In the last

few years, national capitals have sought to conquer markets and attract investment with rather little regard for the EU-level partnerships. A more joined-up approach would be a considerable step forward and very much help to enhance the EU profile, and interests, both with regards to China and in other global regions.

Building resilience

The EUGS confirms Europe's goal to promote the stability of surrounding regions by improving peoples' lives and states' governance there. With a view to that, it outlines an approach rooted in the actual political and material conditions on the ground. As pointed out in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) review of November 2015, the EUGS calls for a differentiated and tailor-made approach to neighbours, depending on whether they seek stronger ties with the EU or not.⁸ In other words, effective relationships with neighbours require first and foremost resilient countries – countries that are well governed and where growth lifts people living standards.

The notion of resilience – "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises" – is the new conceptual anchor for a variety of lines of action. This concept is left broad enough to encompass many dimensions, from democratic institutions to sustainable development. However, the accent moves from a transformative narrative mainly centred on democracy promotion to creating the conditions and capacity for sustainable, endogenous political processes and economic development. The EUGS both presents a narrative that better fits evolving practice and calls to further develop innovative instruments to boost resilience.

The strategy draws a distinction between the countries part of the enlargement process – the Western Balkans and Turkey; the close neighbours – the countries falling within the scope of the ENP; and countries in surrounding regions. This distinction is based on the policy framework that the EU applies and on what the EU has to offer to respective partners – whether membership, association and deep trade agreements or development cooperation and capacity building. Beyond these distinctions, however, the strategy seems to acknowledge that EU influence depends more on the actual demands and expectations of third countries than on what the EU has to offer. Or at least, the starting point should be to assess what the EU's partners want from it. Hence the overall focus on the various dimensions of fragility that affect many of the countries around the EU and the call for tailor-made partnerships and policies that fit both EU interests and the political realities and socio-economic requirements of third countries. The bottom-up, practical approach to build resilience is welcome. However, the operationalisation of this concept will likely present the EU with a number of challenges, in particular when dealing with no-democratic countries.⁹

Flexibility

Flexibility is the common denominator of a double balancing act that runs through the entire strategy. For one, at the political level, the effort to reconcile unity of purpose with the diversity of national outlooks and experiences. For another, at the operational level, the drive to shape comprehensive, joined-up approaches while defining in a timely way targeted, tailor-made policy packages to respond to needs.

As to the political level, the strategy repeats time and again that the EU must stand united at home to punch its weight abroad and to confront threats. It rightly states that the EU's credibility hinges on its unity, achievements and power of attraction. At the same time, the EUGS considers Europe's diversity a source of strength – "a tremendous asset provided that we stand united and work in a coordinated way." It subscribes to the familiar line that what matters is not so much to speak with one voice but to carry the same message.

The debate on diversity needs unpacking. At the policy level, diversity can indeed be an asset (expertise, networks, different capabilities and diplomatic styles) when mobilised for shared purposes. At the political level, with Europe's political cohesion very much weakened by many crises and the Brexit vote, political trends in the EU seem to accentuate the centrifugal dimensions of diversity among member states. The political context is one where different national priorities and threat assessments often complicate common

positions and where member states have undertaken in the last few years important foreign policy initiatives with little or no consultation of their peers or of EU bodies.

Differentiation *per se* is neither good nor bad for EU foreign policy. The question is what member states make of it; whether it produces convergence or divergence. Recently, differentiation has often reflected the trend towards the renationalisation of EU foreign policy. Conversely, national initiatives anchored in the common institutional framework and channelled towards shared goals can contribute much to EU foreign policy. The EUGS stresses that "our diplomatic action must be fully grounded in the Lisbon Treaty." It envisages that the High Representative can invite, under the responsibility of the Council, member states or groups of them, willing and able to contribute, to implement the agreed positions of the Council. The High Representative is also tasked to keep the Council informed and to ensure consistency with other EU policies. In short, flexibility under clear rules may be the best way for the EU to benefit from the diversity of its member states on the international stage while preserving a common front.

As to the operational level, the capacity to deploy a comprehensive, integrated approach to deal with complex crises has long been considered a comparative advantage of the EU. The strategy mainstreams this approach across a variety of challenges and policy areas including tackling conflicts and building peace, dealing with migration, confronting threats that cut across EU borders, fulfilling the Sustainable Development Goals, addressing state fragility and capacity-building, as well as pursuing energy diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and economic diplomacy. Joined-up action is of course required not only among EU institutions but also and crucially between the EU and member states and among the latter. Joint programming in the development field and multinational cooperation in defence procurement are cases in point.

At the same time, the strategy seeks to combine joint action with a more flexible, agile and responsive posture to cope with "predictable unpredictability." Tailor-made approaches are advocated to foster relations with countries in the EU neighbourhood and beyond. The strategy also states that "development policy will become more flexible and more aligned with our strategic priorities." In particular, greater flexibility is needed to mobilise financial instruments in the development field, for example with a view to conflict prevention and civil society support.

In short, the EUGS calls for the EU to be able to assemble, in a timely way, policy packages that match the realities on the ground and are not defined by the EU's institutional or policy divides. The point is not for all institutional actors and tools to be engaged all the time, which would be cumbersome and out of sync with the pace of foreign policy, but for the EU to deploy a more nimble, modular approach. From this standpoint, flexibility is not in contradiction with an integrated, joined-up approach, but an enabling condition for it to be effective.

Partnership

Together with unity, the strategy outlines engagement, responsibility and partnership as guiding principles of EU foreign policy in addressing challenges, delivering public goods and supporting a rules-based global order. This is in line with the EU's long-standing commitment to manage interdependence through international cooperation. Here too, the strategic coordinates provided by the EUGS feature a mix of continuity and innovation. The basic message is that the EU cannot rest on its considerable track record as a multilateral entrepreneur – in other words, it cannot be a status quo power bent on preserving the existing order. In an international context where power has been diffusing between states and beyond them, and ideas compete, the strategy acknowledges that resisting change is not an option. Doing so might trigger the erosion of existing multilateral bodies and foster the emergence of alternative groupings. Hence the "aspiration to transform rather than simply preserve the existing system."

This aspiration translates in a number of envisaged measures to reform international bodies, strengthen the EU's visibility and cohesion therein and invest in the UN system and particularly in peace-keeping and

peace-building efforts. Among other areas of further commitment, sustainable development, climate change, trade and non-proliferation stand out. It is also important that the EUGS points to areas "at the frontiers of global affairs" requiring the development of new rules such as cyber, space, biotechnologies, artificial intelligence, robotics and remotely piloted systems. As technological innovation spreads worldwide much faster than in the past, rule-making on these matters will indeed be crucial to Europe's security and prosperity.

The strategy confirms that the EU should lead by example in a number of areas. However, it also points out that the EU "cannot deliver alone" and highlights that the EU should seek to co-shape global rules based on the principle of co-responsibility with other international actors. Partnering is therefore the lynchpin between the proactive EU stance and the requirement to work with others. Consistent with its approach to other fields of action, the strategy calls for a pragmatic and flexible posture. The EU should perform "as an agenda-shaper, a connector, coordinator and facilitator" within networks of state and non-state actors and international organisations. The issues at stake should determine the adequate format to deliver solutions.

The EUGS approach departs from Europe's traditional emphasis on institutional and inclusive multilateralism and draws closer to the more instrumental, result-oriented attitude to international cooperation of the US. However, this is not a full swing. The strategy restates the EU's commitment to the UN system and its reform, and underscores the EU's distinctive investment in supporting, and working with, regional governance and regimes. This level of engagement appears today of growing relevance to other actors as well, such as in the case of the US when dealing with Asia.

In line with the flexible approach it advocates, the EUGS shuns lists or categories of EU partners on the international stage. The US is the only country defined as a "core partner" but the same terminology is used for the UN or NATO. The importance of the transatlantic partnerships is stressed with reference to both European security and global governance. For the rest, the strategy generally speaks of cooperation with like-minded countries and strategic partners. In short, practice will determine which partner is strategic for what. Besides, the EUGS puts a stronger emphasis than in the past on partnering with non-state actors, whether in building resilience, supporting human rights or regulating new technologies.

The strategy's ambitious global governance agenda presents the EU with various challenges. For one, member states have so far been less than keen to trigger or support reforms in international institutions that would see their clout or position shrink in favour of emerging actors. There is also a question on how internal crises will affect progress towards a stronger presence of the EU as such in multilateral frameworks. For another, the EU will need to promote sufficient coherence between different formats and levels of cooperation. From climate to development, from health to security issues, large and complex governance systems have emerged in the last two decades, including a number of formal and informal groupings, multilateral bodies and bilateral partnerships. This entails a risk of duplication, forum shopping, conflicting agendas and the dispersal of resources and political capital. While some flexibility is surely in order, the EU should also concentrate on how to connect different levels of cooperation and governance initiatives. This includes those promoted by rising powers in parallel to existing formats, such as in the development field, so that different bodies act in complementary ways.

Hic sunt leones: from words to deeds

The EUGS ticks many boxes. It provides an overall rationale for EU foreign policy; outlines sound organising principles; selects priorities in ways broadly consistent with EU interests; points to shortcomings in capabilities and procedures; and it offers quite a bit of guidance for further action. The aspirational dimension of the strategy often grates with both the practice of European foreign policy-making and the constraints imposed by internal and external crises. The aspirations-reality gap is a challenge for any international actor wishing to advance liberal values and hard interests at once in a competitive strategic landscape. The distinctive character of the EU, as a collective international actor composed of several institutions and member states, compounds this challenge. The EUGS seeks to narrow the aspirations-reality gap through "principled pragmatism", namely by toning down aspirations and calling for more tailor-made and joined-up approaches. Both moves are sensible, even if only practice will tell how much consistency the EU will be able to afford.

The document sets out to chart "the way between the Scylla of isolationism and the Charybdis of rash interventionism" for the EU on the global stage. To borrow from this metaphor, the strategy itself now needs to chart its way between the Scylla of oblivion and the Charybdis of implementation. Neither risk is specific to this document. Strategic documents can be overtaken by events or simply discreetly shelved. Procedural complexities and bottlenecks or the sheer opposition of vested interests can hamper the mainstreaming of strategic guidelines through large, articulate bureaucracies. In the case of the EUGS, however, both sets of risks are particularly pronounced.

Already torn by several crises, the post-Brexit vote EU is a pretty toxic environment for setting out big strategic visions. Member states have welcomed the presentation of the new document at the European Council in late June but the extent of their actual political backing of the strategy remains uncertain. However, the June European Council has invited to High Representative, the Commission and the Council to take the work on the EUGS forward. The implementation of the EUGS will depend not only on convergence and cooperation among member states but also on EU institutions (notably the European External Action Service and the Commission) joining forces and pulling in the same direction, while enhancing flexibility and responsiveness.

High Representative Mogherini was of course aware of all that when she submitted the new strategy to EU leaders at the June summit, despite the Brexit vote shockwave. She has made a political choice because, as the EUGS puts it, precisely at a time of existential crisis "Forging unity as Europeans – across institutions, states and peoples – has never been so vital nor so urgent." Besides, she probably felt that no better window of opportunity would open soon to unveil the strategy. Meanwhile, Europe's crisis requires indeed a strong, shared political response, delivering tangible benefits to EU citizens. Foreign and security policy must be part of that response. The question is now to manage expectations, achieve results and sustain the debate.

The EUGS should be seen as a point of departure, and not of arrival. It is an important milestone in a broader process of strategic debate and 'confidence-building' among EU bodies, member states and the European strategic community at large. It also marks a change of gear because it provides guidance for action. The periodic review of the EUGS and of its implementation, envisaged by the strategy itself, can help keep the process on track and reinforce over time a common strategic culture and sense of purpose.¹⁰

The EUGS in itself will not be a decisive factor in catalysing national positions around common ones but it provides a valuable contribution to that end. It offers a point of reference for a soul-searching EU. Prospects for major steps forward in Europe's foreign policy and external action are scarce in the short-term. It will therefore be important to kick off work on selected areas for implementation that can concretely enhance the EU's effectiveness and added value and, consequently, create incentives for member states to join forces at EU level.

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Endnotes

- 1 Sven Biscop speaks of Realpolitik with European characteristics. See Sven Biscop, "The EU Global Strategy: Realpolitik with European Characteristics", Security Policy Brief No. 75, Brussels, Egmont Institute, June 2015.
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- 3 Giovanni Grevi, "A progressive European global strategy", Policy Brief 140, Madrid, FRIDE, November 2012.
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- 6 Daniel Keohane, "The EU Global Strategy and Defence: Ambitious but Credible?", Brussels, Carnegie Europe, 7 July 2016.
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- 10 Stefan Lehne, "The EU Global Strategy, a Triumph of Hope Over Experience", Brussels, Carnegie Europe, 4 July 2016.

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