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The European Union's Changing Approach towards Multilateralism

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About the Author

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Abstract

In this paper I analyse in how far the 2016 EU Global Strategy (EUGS) has changed the European Union (EU)'s approach towards multilateralism compared to the approach under its predecessor, the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS). I identify three major innovations: First, while the EUGS incorporates the EU's long-standing commitment to 'effective multilateralism', its approach of 'effective global governance' goes beyond that earlier approach and represents a qualitatively different concept. Second, the EUGS transcends the ESS in terms of emphasising the need to transform rather than just to preserve the multilateral system. Third, the EUGS neglects traditional 'strategic partnerships' and expands the EU's partnership approach towards engaging with a wider range of actors in a more pragmatic way. In a second step, I discuss the shortcomings of the new approach, which need to be addressed in the EUGS's second year of implementation for which multilateralism has been chosen as a priority area. They include political and conceptual issues concerning the engagement with non-state actors and emerging powers as well as an unresolved dilemma in which individual EU member states must give up power to prevent the erosion of their collective influence and of the multilateral system at large.

Introduction: Revisiting the EU's Approach towards Multilateralism

Since the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS),[1] the European Union (EU)'s "existential commitment to multilateralism"[2] has been considered one of the main features of its foreign policy. It thus comes at little surprise that the ESS's successor, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) of June 2016, under the heading of "Global Governance for the 21st Century" incorporates multilateralism as one of its five priority areas.[3] While not featured among the first round of priorities for the implementation of the EUGS, the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) of July 2017 identifies "supporting global governance, in particular the United Nations" (UN) as an additional priority for 2017-2018.[4] Against this background, I analyse in how far the EU's approach towards multilateralism under the EUGS differs from that of the ESS and identify the shortcomings of the new approach. To that end, I undertake a comparative document analysis of the ESS and the EUGS, which is complemented by relevant academic literature and seven semi-structured interviews with practitioners and academics involved in the drafting of the EUGS's provisions on multilateralism.[5]

In stark contrast to the political salience reinforced by the FAC of July 2017 and to the considerable scholarly attention given to the EU's approach towards multilateralism under the ESS, there is currently still a lack of a comprehensive analysis of the EU's new approach under the EUGS. In addition to addressing this research gap, the relevance of the analysis of the EU's evolving policy towards multilateralism is twofold: Practically, the EU and its member states are the biggest combined donor to the UN[6] and potentially even "the principal and most powerful advocate[s] of multilateralism in the twenty-first century".[7] Academically, the EU's "primordial, almost genetic" commitment to 'effective multilateralism' is a frequently found assumption

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[1] European Council, "European Security Strategy, A Secure Europe in a Better World" [hereafter, "ESS"], Brussels, 12 December 2003.
[2] C. Hill and J. Peterson, "Effective or Defective? Europe's Experience of Multilateralism", in: C. Bouchard, J. Peterson and N. Tocci (eds.), *Multilateralism in the 21st Century: Europe's Quest for Effectiveness*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 70.
[3] EEAS, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" [hereafter, "EUGS"], European External Action Service, Brussels, June 2016.
[4] Council of the European Union, "Outcome of the Meeting" [hereafter, "FAC July 2017"], 11353/17, Brussels, 17 July 2017, p. 3.
[5] See the Bibliography for a list of interview partners.
[6] EU Delegation to the UN, *About the EU at the UN*.
[7] E. Lazarou *et al.*, "The Evolving 'Doctrine' of Multilateralism in the Twenty-first Century", in: C. Bouchard, J. Peterson and N. Tocci (eds.), *Multilateralism in the 21st Century: Europe's Quest for Effectiveness*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 44.

of research on the EU as a foreign policy actor [8] and is considered a doctrine guiding its foreign policy.[9] The continued assessment of the EU's changing approach towards multilateralism is thus important for understanding EU foreign policy in practical and academic terms as well as for the multilateral system at large.

My analysis identifies three main areas in which the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism differs from that of the ESS. First, the EUGS no longer talks about 'effective multilateralism', but about 'effective global governance'. While incorporating the EU's long-standing commitment to the traditional multilateral institutions, 'effective global governance' goes beyond that earlier approach and represents a qualitatively different concept. Second, the EUGS transcends the ESS in terms of its ambition to transform rather than to just preserve the multilateral system. Finally, under the notion of 'partnering' the EUGS expands the EU's partnership approach by emphasising the importance of engaging with a wider range of actors in a more pragmatic way.

Based on these key findings, I argue that the biggest achievement of the EUGS is that it develops a consistent and new 'meta-narrative' of EU foreign policy in the form of 'principled pragmatism'.[10] This narrative is well translated into the Strategy's approach towards multilateralism, which properly considers the changed global environment and the valid critique of 'effective multilateralism'. However, I also identify several shortcomings of the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism, including political and conceptual issues concerning the engagement with non-state actors and emerging powers as well as an unresolved dilemma that requires EU member states to give up power individually to maintain their collective influence and to prevent the erosion of the multilateral system at large. These shortcomings undermine the EU's position to transform the multilateral system and to engage in new forms of partnerships. Consequently, they need to be considered in the upcoming elaboration and implementation of 2017-2018 and beyond. The three innovations also have important implications for the academic study of the EU in the multilateral system. They require, for instance, the reconsideration of the assumption that the EU unconditionally supports multilateral approaches.

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[8] Hill and Peterson, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[9] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
[10] M. K. D. Cross, "The EU Global Strategy and Diplomacy", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, p. 403.

After a background section on the challenges of the multilateral system and the EU's role in it, I analyse the ESS's and the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism and their follow-up and implementation. Subsequently, I discuss the EUGS's innovations and their shortcomings, before drawing conclusions.

Challenges to the Multilateral System

Historically, multilateralism can be traced back to the post-1815 Concert of Europe of sovereign states and the rise of conference diplomacy in the 19th century. Following the breakdown of this system after World War I and the League of Nations' failure to prevent World War II, the post-1945 world saw the creation of a previously unparalleled number of international organisations, including the UN system. This number kept increasing over the course of the second half of the 20th century in response to an accelerating process of globalisation and an increasing number of global challenges.[11] Over the course of the 1990s, it became clear that what Van Langenhove refers to as state-focused "Multilateralism 1.0" was gradually transforming into a more open, contested and complex "Multilateralism 2.0".[12] This transformation was driven by the emergence of international non-state actors, new multilateral policy arenas and organisations and diverging conceptualisations of multilateralism.

The current multilateral system is confronted with three major challenges. First, there is a reinforcement of divergent understandings of the principles of multilateralism caused by the rise of emerging powers such as Brazil, India and China. While these countries are committed to multilateralism, they embrace principles different from those of the EU. According to Keukeleire and Delreux, emerging powers tend to strictly pursue their national interests in the form of unrestricted economic development.[13] This clashes with the EU's commitment to promoting global social, environmental and human rights standards. In terms of approach, emerging powers tend to prefer non-binding agreements as well as consensus-oriented and intergovernmental decision-making respecting national sovereignty, whereas the EU advances legally binding agreements with enforcement mechanisms restricting the contracting parties' sovereignty.

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[11] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.
[12] L. Van Langenhove, "The Transformation of Multilateralism: Mode 1.0 to Mode 2.0", *Global Policy,* vol. 1, no. 3, 2010, pp. 263-270.
[13] S. Keukeleire and T. Delreux, *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 2nd edn., pp. 318-320.

Second, the multilateral system faces the challenge of declining legitimacy. For many emerging powers and developing countries, this decline is linked to the system's bias in favour of the principles and interests of the West.[14] The multilateral system – exacerbated by the lack of reform in its principal bodies – has also lost legitimacy due to the perceived failure to deliver on many traditional challenges, such as international development and security. Furthermore, "[m]ost institutions are creations of the twentieth century and are therefore not necessarily suitable for the challenges of the twenty-first century".[15]

Finally, there is the challenge of fragmentation due to the establishment of alternative multilateral fora and institutions.[16] The implications of such alternatives are ambivalent. On the one hand, "[t]he innovations in multilateral frameworks ensure the survival of multilateralism as an institution, despite the emergence of new powers".[17] Moreover, they are potentially "more 'effective' in either solving collective problems or attracting the commitment of great powers".[18] On the other hand, these alternatives suffer from a lack of inclusiveness, legitimacy and predictability and the danger of replication.[19]

The EU in the Multilateral System

For Kaddous, the EU's participation in the multilateral system is both a "functional necessity" and a "general aspiration".[20] The necessity stems from the need for external representation on issues on which the EU has common policies. The aspiration is the

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[14] J. Jokela, "The G-20: A Pathway to Effective Multilateralism?", *Chaillot Paper*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, April 2011, pp. 56-57.
[15] K. E. Jørgensen, "One Size Fits All", in: E. Drieskens and L. Van Schaik (eds.), *The European External Action Service: Preparing for Success*, Clingendael Papers, no. 1, Clingendael Institute, The Hague, December 2010, p. 21.
[16] For a discussion of four such alternatives under the umbrella of 'minilateralism', see R. N. Haass, "The Case for Messy Multilateralism", *Financial Times*, 5 January 2010.
[17] K. V. Laatikainen, "EU Multilateralism in a Multipolar World", in: K. E. Jørgensen and K. V. Laatikainen (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 484.
[18] *Ibid*.
[19] E. Moret, "Effective Minilateralism for the EU: What, When and How", *ISSUE Brief*, no. 17, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, June 2016, p. 2.
[20] C. Kaddous, "Introduction: The European Union in International Organisations – Functional Necessity or General Aspiration", in C. Kaddous (ed.), *The European Union in International Organisations and Global Governance: Recent Developments*, Oxford, Hart Publishing, 2015, p. 22.

result of the ideational commitment of the EU to multilateralism. Both necessity and aspiration are repeatedly expressed throughout the Lisbon Treaty.[21]

The origin of this ideational commitment and aspiration is frequently associated with Europe's historical experience of unbound nationalism and sovereignty culminating in two World Wars and the EU's own nature as a highly institutionalised multilateral system. Therefore, scholars argue that "the EU's commitment to a multilateral approach can be seen as part of its DNA".[22] Moreover, participation and external representation are essential components of exerting influence internationally, and due to its relative lack of hard power, a rules-based multilateral system is in the EU's strategic interest.[23]

As a result, "the EU has established close relationships and practical working methods to engage in the global governance architecture".[24] Its status in international organisations varies between full membership (e.g. at the World Trade Organisation [WTO]), observership (e.g. at the UN) and no representation (e.g. at the International Monetary Fund [IMF]). Some form of observer is the most frequent status.[25] Beyond the legal dimension, the way in which the EU participates in practice differs from location to location.[26] Politically "[m]any of the EU's foreign policy actions are explicitly adopted alongside or in support of the initiatives of other international organizations".[27] Financially, the EU and its member states combined are the largest donor to the UN, amounting to the contribution of 30.38% to the regular UN budget, 33.17% to the peacekeeping budget and to roughly 50% of all voluntary contributions to UN programmes and funds.[28]

Nevertheless, the EU's external representation is constrained by the membership provisions of international organisations and conventions, many of them restricting membership to states. If the EU can join an international organisation it is usually via a Regional (Economic) Integration Organisation (REIO/RIO) clause, but its rights tend to

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[21] Concerning the necessity, see the principles of conferral of powers (Article 5(2) TEU), sincere cooperation (Article 4(3) TEU), and consistency of external action (Article 21(3) TEU), and the provision on cooperation with international organisations (Article 221(1) TFEU). The aspiration is for instance expressed in Articles 21(1), 21(2) and 3(5) TEU.
[22] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 301.
[23] Jokela, *op. cit*., p. 56.
[24] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 299.
[25] *Ibid.,* p. 302.
[26] See e.g. Kaddous, *op. cit*., for a comparative analysis of the EU in five major international organisations.
[27] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 299.
[28] EU Delegation to the UN, *op. cit.*

be inferior to those of member states. Furthermore, the EU's own member states are usually parties in their own right, leading to a situation of mixed membership and the need for internal coordination.[29]

Against the background of the state of the multilateral system and the EU's position in it as provided above, the next section analyses the EU's former approach towards multilateralism under the ESS.

The European Security Strategy

As embodied in the ESS's opening sentence that "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free",[30] the early 2000s were a particularly optimist time in the EU. This was due to the prospect of a Constitutional Treaty, the upcoming enlargement, and the overall impression that the world was looking at and admiring Europe.[31] At the same time, however, the newly elected Bush administration's National Security Strategy of 2002 declared the United States' (US) readiness to engage in pre-emptive war.[32] Subsequently, the US-led 'coalition of the willing's' disregard of the UN Security Council (UNSC) sparked controversy among, and eventually divided, the Europeans between member states supporting the intervention in Iraq and those opposing it.[33]

It was in this context in May 2003 that the then German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer informally proposed the idea of developing a strategy concept for Europe.[34] Via an intermediary report and backed by a Commission Communication,[35] the then High Representative (HR) Javier Solana swiftly drafted what was to become the ESS with a small team and limited consultation.[36] The ESS was formally adopted by the

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[29] P. J. Kuijper *et al.*, *The Law of EU External Relations: Cases, Materials, and Commentary on the EU as an International Legal Actor*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015, 2nd edn., p. 170.
[30] European Council, *ESS, op. cit.*, p. 1.
[31] J. Howorth, "EU Global Strategy in a Changing World: Brussels' Approach to the Emerging Powers", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, p. 390.
[32] The White House, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America", Washington, DC, September 2002.
[33] R. Kissack, *Pursuing Effective Multilateralism: The European Union, International Organisations and the Politics of Decision-Making*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 1.
[34] A. Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy: Background, Process, References*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2015, p. 13.
[35] European Commission, "The European Union and the United Nations: The Choice of Multilateralism", Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament, COM(2003) 526 final, 10 September 2003.
[36] Missiroli, *Towards an EU Global Strategy, op. cit.,* p. 13.

European Council in December 2003.[37] Considering the mixed record and limited scope of previous strategic planning in the realm of foreign policy, the ESS was regarded a "breakthrough",[38] which "marked the EU's coming of age as a strategic actor".[39]

Approach towards Multilateralism

The ESS identifies 'An International Order Based on Effective Multilateralism' as one of three strategy objectives, which, however, clearly stands out as the central one. For Biscop, 'effective multilateralism' summarises the two other strategic objectives: The first objective, 'Addressing the Threats', "can only succeed in the long-term through the root causes approach of Effective Multilateralism", whereas the second one, 'Building Security in our Neighbourhood', "is the application of the same principles in the proximity of the EU".[40] Thereby, and by constituting an objective in itself, "multilateralism is treated in the ESS both as an instrument and as a goal in a quest for the best means and concrete ends".[41]

The ESS defines 'effective multilateralism' as the "development of a stronger international society, well-functioning international institutions and a rule-based international order".[42] It is based on the principles of international law with the UN Charter and sovereign states at its core.[43] The ESS's overall message is that the multilateral system in post-World War II terms is fine and "unchallenged".[44] However, it is considered to be in need of strengthening if it is to be preserved and "to fulfil its responsibilities and to act effectively".[45] For this purpose, the ESS seeks to further develop and widen the membership of the traditional post-1945 international organisations such as the UN and the international financial institutions (IFIs) and to

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[37] Council of the European Union, "Presidency Conclusions", Brussels European Council, 12-13 December 2003, 5381/04, Brussels, 5 February 2004, pp. 21-22.
[38] A. Missiroli, *Strategy Matters*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, July 2014, p. viii.
[39] M. Mälksoo, "From the ESS to the EU Global Strategy: External Policy, Internal Purpose", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, p. 378.
[40] S. Biscop, "Effective Multilateralism: Bringing the European Way into Practice", in: S. Biscop (ed.), "Audit of European Strategy", *Egmont Paper,* no. 3, Egmont, Brussels, December 2004, p. 27.
[41] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 51.
[42] European Council, *ESS, op. cit.*, p. 10.
[43] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-52.
[44] N. Tocci, "The Making of the EU Global Strategy", *Contemporary Security Policy*, vol. 37, no. 3, 2016, p. 464.
[45] European Council, *ESS, op. cit.*, p. 9.

support the international organisations newly created in the 1990s, such as the WTO and the International Criminal Court.[46]

Despite this overwhelming commitment to universal multilateralism, the ESS states that regional organisations "also strengthen global governance"[47] and considers them stepping stones for 'effective multilateralism'. The same applies to 'strategic partners'.[48] While no legal or procedural basis has been established since the term 'strategic partnership' was introduced in 1998,[49] the ESS is the first document to name such partners,[50] namely Canada, China, India, Japan, the US, Russia and "all those who share our goals and values, and are prepared to act in their support".[51] Yet, for Laatikanen, the ESS's approach

> embraces two somewhat contradictory visions of international order; one premised upon a rule-based multilateral order supported by international institutions and rule of law, the other an explicitly political order wherein great powers jointly coordinate amongst themselves issues of bilateral and collective concern.[52]

The appeal of 'effective multilateralism' as the ESS's dominant theme is based on the achievement of embodying, addressing and reconciling several issues at the same time. In terms of foreign policy, 'effective multilateralism' was acceptable to all member states. By disassociating itself from the US's unilateralism it also sharpened the EU's international profile and identity.[53] Internally, 'effective multilateralism' reconciles the European-integrationist countries, such as France and Germany, with the Atlantic camp, led by the United Kingdom. It does so by accommodating the integrationists' more unconditional commitment to multilateralism and their initiative to upload it to the European level, "while qualifying such multilateralism as effective, thus allowing

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[46] *Ibid., pp. 9-10.*
[47] European Council, *ESS, op. cit*., p. 8.
[48] *Ibid*., p. 13.
[49] Council of the European Union, "Presidency Conclusions", Vienna European Council, 11-12 December 1998, 00300/1/98 REV, p. 9.
[50] C.-C. Cîrlig, "EU Strategic Partnerships with Third Countries", *Library Briefing*, Brussels, Library of the European Parliament, 120354REV1, 26 September 2012, pp. 1-2.
[51] European Council, *ESS, op. cit*., pp. 13-14.
[52] K. V. Laatikainen, "EU Multilateralism in a Multipolar World", in: K. E. Jørgensen and K. V. Laatikainen (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 472.
[53] R. Kissack, "The European Union and Multilateralism", in: K. E. Jørgensen and K. V. Laatikainen (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 407.

the (...) 'Atlantic' member states to give Washington a nod and a wink".[54] Furthermore, 'effective multilateralism' serves as a unifying framework embracing many EU foreign policy objectives mentioned in the ESS, such as good governance, the rule of law and human rights.[55]

In the following section I examine the ESS's implementation and development over time followed by an overview of its academic assessment.

Policy and Institutional Developments

The ESS was considered an "unqualified success" in terms of re-establishing political unity and saving the EU foreign policy project after the division over Iraq.[56] Yet, despite its strategic outlook, the ESS's policy implications along the lines of "more active, capable, and coherent" are fairly broad and no means of implementation were subsequently specified in greater detail. According to Missiroli, "it was HR Solana himself who preferred to keep the ESS as a general 'doctrine' and resisted calls to translate it into a series of detailed action plans".[57] As a result, for Tocci, the ESS "was only partially a strategy".[58]

After the failure to ratify the Constitutional Treaty in 2005, the Lisbon Treaty entered into force in December 2009. Despite some drawbacks compared to the provisions of the Constitutional Treaty, Lisbon signalled the EU's ambition to become a more active and recognised international player.[59] It brought about important innovations such as the creation of the double-hatted HR/VP, the foundation for the subsequent creation of the EEAS and the upgrade of the ESDP to the CSDP.[60] For Gstöhl, however, due to the lack of internal and external political support, the Lisbon Treaty's innovations "remedy the shortcomings of EU multilateral diplomacy only to a limited degree (...) [and] do not necessarily lead to more effective multilateralism".[61]

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[54] N. Tocci, "Towards an EU Global Strategy", in: A. Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy: Background, Process, References*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2015, p. 116.
[55] Kissack, *The European Union and Multilateralism*, *op. cit.*, p. 407.
[56] Missiroli, *Towards an EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit.,* p. 15.
[57] Missiroli, *Strategy Matters, op. cit.*, p. ix.
[58] Tocci, *Towards an EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.
[59] E. Drieskens, "Introduction: A Framework for Analysing Effective Multilateralism", in: E. Drieskens and L. Van Schaik (eds.), *The EU and Effective Multilateralism: Internal and External Reform Practices*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 1.
[60] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[61] S. Gstöhl, "EU Diplomacy After Lisbon: More Effective Multilateralism?", *Brown Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2011, p. 182.

One day after the Lisbon Treaty was signed, in December 2007, the European Council tasked Solana to "examine the implementation" of the ESS.[62] The resulting Report "largely repeated the contents of the strategy [the ESS], with only some small innovations".[63] Concerning multilateralism, it re-iterated the centrality of 'effective multilateralism' as the framework of the EU's external action. Yet, by stating that "Europe must lead a renewal of the multilateral order"[64] it went beyond the ESS in terms of recognising the urgency and degree of change required. This can be seen as a response to the stated recognition that "globalisation is accelerating shifts in power and is exposing differences in values".[65] However, the Report lacked the buy-in of member states which were soon divided over whether or not to come up with a comprehensive new strategy.[66]

Institutionally, the establishment of the EEAS, which was formally launched in January 2011, was a major breakthrough that followed from the Lisbon Treaty.[67] For Biscop, the creation of the EEAS and other institutional reforms of the Lisbon Treaty are closely related to the ESS and its call for 'effective multilateralism' as they are required "for the elaboration of integrated [external] policies to be at all possible".[68] However, the subsequent attempt to upgrade the EU's status at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in order to reflect the Lisbon Treaty's enhanced provisions on external representation initially failed and a resolution was only adopted with less participation rights in May 2011.[69] Moreover, the implementation of the UNGA resolution has been challenging and the trickle down of the EU's enhanced status at the UNGA to other UN bodies did not materialise as expected.[70] A strategy paper "for the progressive improvement of the EU status in international organisations and other fora in line with

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[62] Council of the European Union, "Presidency Conclusions", Brussels European Council, 14 December 2007, 16616/1/07, Brussels, 14 February 2008, p. 24.
[63] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 55.
[64] European Council, "Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy – Providing Security in a Changing World", Council, S407/08, Brussels, 11 December 2008, p. 2.
[65] *Ibid*., p. 1.
[66] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 55.
[67] Council of the European Union, "Council Decision (2010/427/EC) of 26 July 2010 Establishing the Organisation and Functioning of the European External Action Service", *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 201/30, 3 August 2010.
[68] Biscop, *Effective Multilateralism*, *op. cit*., p. 31.
[69] United Nations General Assembly, "Resolution 65/276, Participation of the European Union in the Work of the United Nations", A/RES/65/276, 3 May 2011.
[70] J. Wouters, A.-L. Chané and J. Odermatt, "Improving the EU's Status in the UN and the UN System: An Objective Without a Strategy?", *Working Paper*, no. 133, Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, Leuven, March 2014, pp. 8-9.

the objectives of the Treaty of Lisbon"[71] was presented by the Commission in 2012, but also experienced limited success. For Wouters, Chané and Odermatt this so-called Barroso-Ashton Strategy "lack[ed] the required level of vision and precision, and [wa]s thus inadequate for guiding the EU's efforts towards assuming its desired leadership role at the UN level".[72]

Academic Assessment

Overall, "[t]he 2003 ESS triggered massive academic interest, including an entire 'generation' of PhD dissertations in political science, international relations and European studies".[73] The overall academic assessment of 'effective multilateralism' in conceptual and practical terms is mixed. Conceptually, all interviewees confirmed that 'effective multilateralism' has continued to resonate well with EU diplomats and practitioners. Lazarou *et al.* go even further and argue that "the use of multilateralism as a focal point in EU foreign policy may be perceived as constituting an evolving doctrine".[74]

However, 'effective multilateralism' remains elusive as a term and is interpreted in different ways by different actors. This is illustrated by the extensive academic discussion of 'effective multilateralism' as a concept, which has found "little agreement on what this exactly entails".[75] Therefore, for Keukeleire and Delreux, "the meaning of 'effective multilateralism' seems to have been eroded".[76] Bouchard, Peterson and Tocci argue that the tension between the simultaneous promotion of 'effective multilateralism', regionalism and 'strategic partnerships' remains unresolved, too.[77] Furthermore, they point out that the EU, for instance at the WTO, "also vigorously defends European interests within international organisations (…), at times in line with the broader goals of the multilateral grouping in question, at times not".[78]

Practically, Ujvari argues that 'effective multilateralism' in the form of supporting "legally binding commitments agreed upon by the largest number of nations possible

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[71] European Commission, "Strategy for the Progressive Improvement of the EU Status in International Organisations and other Fora in Line with the Objectives of the Treaty of Lisbon", Communication to the Commission from the President in Agreement with Vice-President Ashton, C(2012) 9420 final, Brussels, 20 December 2012.
[72] Wouters *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
[73] Missiroli, *Towards an EU Global Strategy, op. cit.,* p. 155.
[74] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[75] Kissack, *The European Union and Multilateralism*, *op. cit.*, p. 406.
[76] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit.,* p. 300.
[77] Bouchard, Peterson and Tocci, *Introduction*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[78] *Ibid.*

through strong multilateral institutions has (…) fallen short of defining international relations of the past decade".[79] Indeed, in most other areas of global governance, with the potential exception of climate, the trend has rather been towards more bilateralism or minilateralism. Examples are the fields of development and trade in which regional and parallel structures have proliferated.[80]

Concerning the ESS's ambition to contribute to the reform of multilateral institutions, according to Drieskens and Van Schaik, the "empirical picture (…) is one of mixed success":[81] While there is extensive evidence for the operationalisation of 'effective multilateralism', the EU and its member states predominantly "stayed away from high-level commitments on substantial reform and concentrated their efforts on procedural, administrative and technical issues".[82] In addition, the EU, and with it 'effective multilateralism', has lost relative appeal over the past ten years,[83] for instance due to the financial crisis; the disappointing response to the Arab Spring; and the increasingly apparent "gap between the EU's self-perception as a 'positive power' and the way it is perceived in other parts of the world".[84] This is illustrated by the fact that the strategy of 'leading by example', the origin of which can partly be traced back to the ESS, has for long been untenable.[85]

The EU Global Strategy

In addition to the ongoing pressure by some member states to replace the ESS, it was in the context of an exacerbated security environment that the European Council agreed to invite the HR/VP in December 2013 "to assess the impact of changes in the global environment".[86] Upon her appointment as HR/VP in July 2014, Federica Mogherini quickly expressed the need for a "strategic rethink" in EU foreign policy.[87]

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[79] B. Ujvari "Introduction – The EU Global Strategy and Multilateralism", in: B. Ujvari (ed.), *The EU Global Strategy: Going beyond Effective Multilateralism?*, European Policy Centre and Egmont, Brussels, June 2016, p. 9.
[80] *Ibid.*
[81] E. Drieskens, "Conclusion: The Compatibility of Internal and External Reform", in: E. Drieskens and L. Van Schaik (eds.), *The EU and Effective Multilateralism: Internal and External Reform Practices*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 193.
[82] *Ibid*., p. 188.
[83] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., pp. 58-60.
[84] *Ibid*., p. 60.
[85] J. Schmidt, "The EU's Multilateralism as Proactive Engagement", in: B. Ujvari (ed.), *The EU Global Strategy: Going beyond Effective Multilateralism?*, European Policy Centre and Egmont, Brussels, June 2016, p. 13.
[86] European Council, "Conclusions", 19-20 December 2013, EUCO 217/13, Brussels, 20 December 2013, p. 4.
[87] Tocci, *Towards an EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*, p. 115.

Her strategic assessment for the European Council stated that "[w]e need a common, comprehensive and consistent EU global strategy".[88] By 2015, the security context had further deteriorated and the strategic assessment painted the picture of an "arc of instability" surrounding the EU and of a "more connected, contested and complex world".[89] As a result, member states eventually agreed in June 2015 to task Mogherini to produce a new "global strategy on foreign and security policy".[90]

For Tocci, it was clear that "a process of strategic reflection for the EU in 2015-2016 could look nothing like what it did back in 2003".[91] Instead, it had to be more inclusive and action-oriented. The process consisted of a "public outreach and consultation" dimension with a dedicated website,[92] 50 events across and outside the EU and written expert opinions[93] as well as of an "official and institutional" dimension which involved member states via dedicated national points of contact and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER).[94] In terms of scope, the EUGS's ambition was to be global geographically and policy-wise, thus being more than a security strategy and incorporating the full spectrum of the EU's external action. This reflects Mogherini's double-hatted HR/VP role and the evolution of the EU's foreign policy instruments, competences and capabilities since 2003.[95]

The EUGS's first chapter specifies the foreign policy interests of the EU as peace and security, prosperity, democracy and "a rules-based global order".[96] Its second chapter defines the principles of the EU's external action: unity, engagement, responsibility and partnership. It also introduces 'principled pragmatism' as the EUGS's new 'meta-narrative' guiding the EU's external actions, which "seeks to move the debate away from false dichotomies and well known hypocrisies (…) [e.g.] on 'interests versus values'"[97] and recognises the limits of 'leading by example'. Together, the first two chapters form the Strategy's bedrock and develop the narrative which is subsequently translated into the third chapter on the priorities of the EU's external

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[88] EEAS, "The European Union in a Changing Global Environment: A more Connected, Contested and Complex World", European External Action Service, Brussels, June 2015, p. 20.
[89] *Ibid*., p. 4.
[90] European Council, "Conclusions", 25-26 June 2015, EUCO 22/15, Brussels, 26 June 2015, p. 5.
[91] Tocci, *The Making of the EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*., p. 462.
[92] Available from https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en (accessed 20 July 2017).
[93] These expert opinions are published in A. Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy: Consulting the Experts,* European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, April 2016.
[94] Tocci, *The Making of the EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*., p. 464.
[95] *Ibid*., p. 2.
[96] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., pp. 13-16.
[97] Tocci, *Interview EUGS*, *op. cit*., p. 6.

action. These priority areas are: The Security of our Union, State and Societal Resilience to our East and South, an Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises, Cooperative Regional Orders, and Global Governance for the 21st Century.[98] The final chapter entitled "From Vision to Action" makes the case for a more credible, responsive and joined-up Union.[99]

The next section analyses the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism and examines how it fits within the broader content of the document as outlined above.

Approach towards Multilateralism

The sub-chapter "Global Governance for the 21st Century" starts off with the re-affirmation of the ESS's commitment to "a strong UN as the bedrock of the multilateral rules-based order".[100] The remainder of the sub-chapter is structured along seven issues, which jointly constitute the EUGS's approach towards achieving its vision of global governance: reforming, investing, implementing, deepening, widening, developing and partnering.

There are several important inter-linkages with other sections that embed the sub-chapter on global governance within the EUGS at large. First, there is the interest in "A Rules-Based Global Order" as set out in the first chapter. It states that "[a]s a Union of medium-to-small sized countries, we have a shared European interest in facing the world together".[101] This interest, in turn, is linked to the principle of 'unity' and recognises that, unlike partners such as the US, the EU does not have the luxury not to be committed to multilateralism.[102] By further stating that "[a] multilateral order grounded in international law (...) is the only guarantee for peace and security at home and abroad",[103] the indispensability of a rules-based global order is reinforced and explicitly linked to the interest in peace and security.

The key principles of the EUGS that are relevant for its approach towards multilateralism are particularly those of 'responsibility' and 'partnership'.[104] The section on responsibility begins by stating that "[i]n a more contested world, the EU will be

[98] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., pp. 18-44.
[99] *Ibid*., pp. 44-51.
[100] *Ibid*., p. 39.
[101] *Ibid*., p. 15.
[102] Interview with EEAS official 2, Brussels, 30 March 2017.
[103] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
[104] Interview with EEAS official 5, Brussels, 11 April 2017.

guided by a strong sense of responsibility".[105] Moreover, it says that "[w]e will take responsibility foremost in Europe and its surrounding regions, while pursuing targeted engagement further afield".[106] This conceptualisation of responsibility is very much a reflection of 'principled pragmatism', which acknowledges the normative component of the commitment to a rules-based global order, but also recognises the limits of what the EU is capable of doing globally. In the partnership section, the EUGS further qualifies the EU's responsibility by stating that "responsibility must be shared and requires investing in our partnerships".[107]

In the following, I identify and analyse three main areas in which the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism innovates and differs from that of the ESS.

Innovation 1: Effective Global Governance

One of the most striking observations is that the EUGS does not mention 'effective multilateralism' anymore. Instead, it talks about 'effective global governance'. Yet, all interview partners confirmed that this does not imply a complete departure away from multilateralism. Rather, 'effective global governance' is a broader term that comprises 'effective multilateralism' and its established notions of 'investing' in traditional international organisations, particularly the UN; working towards 'implementing' multilateral commitments; 'deepening' existent rules; and 'widening' the reach of norms and membership of international organisations.[108]

However, the term 'effective global governance' also recognises the limits of multilateralism and the need for more flexibility in working with different groups and types of partners in different formats if the issue at stake so requires.[109] This entails actions that go beyond the ESS, namely a more urgent call for 'reforming' (and even 'transforming') multilateral institutions.[110] What is more, the EUGS adds the new notions of 'developing' governance in under-regulated fields such as cyber, artificial intelligence, health, biotechnology, energy, robotics and remotely piloted systems;[111]

[105] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.,* p. 17.
[106] *Ibid*., p. 18.
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] *Ibid.*, pp. 40-42.
[109] Interview with EEAS official 5, *op. cit.*
[110] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
[111] *Ibid*., pp. 42-43.

and of 'partnering' "with states and organisations, but also with the private sector and civil society" via formats that "may vary from case to case".[112]

In this sense, 'effective global governance' is a translation of 'principled pragmatism' into the realm of multilateralism. By starting to look at the issue at stake and only subsequently considering which actors and mechanisms or governance arrangements are required to address it, the approach is more pragmatic in the sense of issue-driven and problem-oriented.[113] For Ujvari, this is "a stark contrast with the ESS's approach of 'promoting rule-making in a top-down fashion through formal global institutions'",[114] which was more principled.

The interviews revealed that the principled and at the same time pragmatic approach of 'effective global governance' also reflects a political compromise between member states defending a more traditional 'UN first' approach (e.g. Austria, Ireland and Sweden) and others (such as France and Germany) as well as the HR/VP herself, who were open towards a more flexible, bottom-up approach based on local ownership. The arguments exchanged on this issue reflected the debate around preventing a further destabilisation of the already extensively challenged UN system versus not closing the doors to new actors and formats.[115]

All interview partners, however, emphasised the importance of bringing solutions found outside the established multilateral system back to it, thus using minilateral agreements as building blocks for the multilateral level. Successful examples referred to are the Iran nuclear deal and the Minsk II Agreement.

Innovation 2: Transformation of the Multilateral System

Overall, the language on reform that found its way into the EUGS is fairly bold. As opposed to the ESS, the EUGS's commitment to the UN at the heart of the multilateral system "translates into an aspiration to transform rather than simply preserve the existing system".[116] Additionally, it states that "the EU will aspire to play a leading role in supporting the emergence of multilateral governance notably in areas like cyber security, digital economy, space or health".[117]

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[112] *Ibid.*, p. 43.
[113] Interview with Nathalie Tocci (via Skype), 6 April 2017.
[114] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[115] Interview with EEAS official 3, Brussels, 31 March 2017.
[116] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[117] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

More specifically, the section on 'reforming' states that a commitment to 'effective global governance' entails the necessity to reform bodies such as the UN, the UNSC, and the IFIs as "[r]esisting change risks triggering the erosion of such institutions and the emergence of alternative groupings to the detriment of all EU Member States".[118] This is a new message and strong wording – particularly when considering that some EU member states have become members of such alternative institutions, for instance the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), themselves. While the ESS's focus was on consolidating traditional IFIs, "the EUGS does not even seem to take their central role as given any more".[119] Instead, it recognises the challenges of multipolarity, declining legitimacy and fragmentation of the multilateral system, and urges these institutions to change if their influence and EU member states' disproportionally high share of it is to be maintained. For the EU itself, the priorities for reform are "strengthen[ing] its voice and acquir[ing] greater visibility and cohesion" at the UN and IFIs as well as "work[ing] towards an increasingly unified representation of the euro area in the International Monetary Fund".[120]

While there was a consensus on the need to make the multilateral system more effective, some parties called for a language that would have been even stronger than 'transforming' the existing system. Others cautioned that the EU has not only benefitted from, but has also been instrumental in building up the multilateral system. This included moving it beyond national interests and state sovereignty, which, from the EU's perspective, is regarded a considerable advancement that should not be jeopardised.[121]

Another controversial issue was that of the representativeness of the existent system. Again, there was a consensus among member states on the general direction, namely that for the multilateral system to persist, the legitimate aspirations of emerging powers, which did not yet feature prominently on the agenda in 2003, had to be recognised.[122] However, it would have been politically impossible to specify any modalities for reform or to state explicitly that, in order to individually do so, EU member states had to give up power.[123] Instead, the EUGS merely highlights the EU's commitment to the generic principles of "accountability, representativeness,

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[118] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[119] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[120] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.
[121] Interview with EEAS official 4, Brussels, 31 March 2017.
[122] Interview with EEAS official 3, *op. cit.*
[123] Interview with Nathalie Tocci, *op. cit.*

responsibility, effectiveness and transparency" and qualifies this commitment with the elusive statement that "[t]he practical meaning of such principles will be fleshed out case-by-case".[124]

Innovation 3: Partnering

More pragmatism and flexibility than in 2003 also characterise the EUGS's approach towards the partners with whom 'effective global governance' is to be achieved. This is embodied in the central term of 'partnering', which recognises the need for partners, but provides considerable room for defining who these partners are. Overall, the need for partner(s)/partnership(s) receives a more prominent role in the EUGS (mentioned 73 times) than in the ESS (mentioned 11 times).[125]

Recognising the limits of what the EU can do on its own to address transnational challenges, the section on partnership identifies 'co-responsibility' as the Union's "guiding principle in advancing a rules-based global order".[126] Additionally, it is stated that

> [w]e will partner selectively with players whose cooperation is necessary to deliver global public goods and address common challenges. We will deepen our partnerships with civil society and the private sector as key actors in a networked world. We will do so through dialogue and support, but also through more innovative forms of engagement.[127]

These three sentences are a key innovation reflecting the EUGS's focus on 'principled pragmatism' and 'effective global governance'. They represent a clear departure from the ESS's more principled, universalist, state-focused and formalised approach towards partnerships. For instance, instead of only partnering strategically with those entities "who share our goals and values",[128] the EU now recognises the necessity to engage with those actors "whose cooperation is necessary". Furthermore, the EUGS is the first official EU foreign policy document that grants such extensive attention to the need to collaborate with non-state actors in global governance. These include civil society (mentioned 22 times), the private sector (mentioned ten times), and public-private partnerships (mentioned three times).

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[124] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
[125] Interview with EEAS official 5, *op. cit.*
[126] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.,* p. 18.
[127] *Ibid.*
[128] *Ibid.,* p. 14.

Even within the sovereignty-based realm of states, regional organisations and international organisations, the range of partners explicitly mentioned in the EUGS is much broader than that of the ESS, which had an "overwhelming emphasis on the United States, NATO and a handful of other regional organisations".[129] Next to a total of eight international organisations that were not mentioned in the ESS, the EUGS also refers to a wider range of partner countries, including Indonesia, Iran, the Republic of Korea and Turkey.[130] This reflects the increased multipolarity, fragmentation and importance of regional powers and regions in the multilateral system, which the EUGS recognises as "critical spaces of governance in a de-centred world".[131]

Additionally, the EUGS has a very different take on 'strategic partnerships' and implicitly codifies an already ongoing process of overhauling the EU's approach towards these partnerships.[132] This reflects that they are largely deemed ineffective and "rather a goal to be pursued (…) than a reflection of reality".[133] The number of 'strategic partnerships' has grown considerably since the ESS provided a first indication and is considered to include ten bilateral strategic partnerships.[134] While being highly heterogeneous in nature,[135] all strategy partnerships tend to follow a very formalistic, institutionalised and long-term oriented pattern, including sectoral dialogues, ministerial meetings and annual summits.[136]

Against this background, the EUGS uses the term 'strategic partner(s)/partnership(s)' more loosely and only three times.[137] For Howorth, "it is telling that the EUGS effectively reduces the relationship with these [emerging/strategic] powers to one dominated by the quest for global governance".[138] When referring to NATO, the UN and the US, the EUGS even avoids the label of 'strategic partnership' and talks instead of "core partners".[139] Thus, with the introduction of the term

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[129] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*., p. 3.
[130] The additional international organisations mentioned in the EUGS are the Arab League, the Arctic Council, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), ECOWAS, the East Africa Community, the G20, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
[131] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
[132] Interview with EEAS official 5, *op. cit.*
[133] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit*., p. 291.
[134] According to *ibid*., p. 290, the bilateral strategic partners are considered to be Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, and the US.
[135] Cîrlig, *op. cit*., p. 2.
[136] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit.,* p. 290.
[137] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., pp. 38, 43.
[138] Howorth, *op. cit*., p. 390.
[139] See e.g. EEAS*, EUGS*, *op. cit*., pp. 18, 22, 37.

'partnering', the EUGS moves away from the "rhetorical façade"[140] of overly institutionalised 'strategic partnerships' which have failed to become stepping stones for 'effective multilateralism' towards a more pragmatic and flexible approach. With the potential exception of the more limited number of 'core partners', this new approach does not *per se* privilege any partner over another.[141]

In the next section I analyse the preliminary implementation and political reception of the EUGS.

Implementation

Due to the shockwaves of Brexit only five days before, the EUGS did not attract much attention following its submission to the European Council in June 2016. The European Council in a single sentence "welcome[d] the presentation" of the EUGS.[142] Yet, as opposed to the ESS, the EUGS contains specific and systematic provisions on its implementation. The latter consists of three components: first, the revision of existent and the design of new sectoral and geographic strategies in line with the EUGS; second, a yearly revision of the EUGS and its priorities for implementation; and third, the launch of "a new process of strategic reflection (...) whenever the EU and its member states deem it necessary".[143]

The priorities for implementation for the first year, endorsed by the FAC in October 2016, focused on building resilience in the neighbourhood, an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, and a joined-up Union, thus enhancing synergies between external and internal policies.[144] A report on the implementation of the EUGS in these areas was presented to the FAC in June 2017[145] and depicts the Strategy as "a springboard to relaunch the process of European integration after the British referendum".[146]

Finally, next to cooperative regional orders, the July 2017 FAC identified multilateralism as an additional priority for implementation in the second year of the

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[140] Keukeleire and Delreux, *op. cit.,* p. 291.
[141] Interview with EEAS official 5, *op. cit.*
[142] European Council, "Conclusions", 28 June 2016, EUCO 26/16, Brussels, 28 June 2016, p. 7.
[143] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., p. 51.
[144] Council of the European Union, "Council Conclusions on the Global Strategy on the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy", 17 October 2016, 13202/16, Luxembourg, 17 October 2016, pp. 3-4.
[145] Council of the European Union, "Outcome of the Meeting", 10424/17, Luxembourg, 19 June 2017, p. 4.
[146] EEAS, "Implementing the EU Global Strategy: Year 1", Brussels, 19 June 2017, p. 5.

EUGS in 2017-2018. The implementation is supposed to focus on "supporting global governance, in particular the United Nations", the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament as well as cyber security.[147] The same FAC meeting also approved the EU's priorities at the UNGA for 2017-2018.[148] The document largely echoes the EUGS's provisions on multilateralism and might become an important source of reference for its upcoming implementation, too. It states that "multilateralism is the most powerful tool that we have in our hands" and that "[t]he UN remains the lynchpin of our global engagement".[149]

Discussion of the Innovations under the EU Global Strategy

The comparative analysis of the EU's approach towards multilateralism revealed three main innovations under the EUGS compared to the ESS: (1) the promotion of 'effective global governance' (rather than of 'effective multilateralism'); (2) the ambition to transform the multilateral system (rather than to preserve it); and (3) the inclusive concept of 'partnering' (rather than the selective engagement with a small number of like-minded states and traditional international organisations). Below, I critically discuss these three innovations and identify their shortcomings.

Innovation 1: From Effective Multilateralism to Effective Global Governance

As outlined in the previous section, the EUGS's notion of 'effective global governance' builds on the ESS and 'effective multilateralism', but is an expanded and qualitatively different concept. The qualitative difference between the two concepts becomes apparent when considering how multilateralism and global governance are commonly conceptualised in the academic literature. "While striking deals through universal institutions certainly remains the EU's preferred approach",[150] the EUGS advances a case-by-case approach, which potentially disregards what is commonly regarded the bedrock of multilateralism, namely, generalised principles of conduct, indivisibility and diffuse reciprocity.[151] Instead, it seeks to make use of the full range of

[147] FAC July 2017, *op. cit*., p. 3.
[148] Council of the European Union, "EU Priorities at the United Nations and the 72nd United Nations General Assembly (September 2017 – September 2018)", 11332/17, Brussels, 17 July 2017.
[149] *Ibid*., p. 18.
[150] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*., p. 2.
[151] J. G. Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution", *International Organization*, no. 46, vol. 3, 1992, p. 571.

"institutions, regimes, processes, partnerships, and networks that contribute to collective action and problem solving at the international level"[152] that jointly constitute global governance. This is a stark contrast to the ESS for which multilateralism means quite the opposite, namely "that international issues are preferably not dealt with case by case".[153] In this sense, for the ESS 'effective multilateralism' is both means and end, whereas for the EUGS 'effective global governance' is the new means and 'effective multilateralism' becomes a component of a rules-based global order as one among several ends.

Nevertheless, next to the ongoing preference for formal multilateralism, the EU also seeks to multilateralise agreements reached differently or informally *a posteriori*. This comes close to the dual system of formality and informality that Penttilä refers to as "multilateralism light".[154] This multilateralism is based on a division of labour according to which "informal organisations are increasingly responsible for the process of solving problems while formal organisations concentrate on legitimising the results".[155] For Penttilä, this is an irreversible and positive development as it allows for bringing together the relevant actors to address a particular issue at hand and for integrating emerging powers into global governance.[156]

Yet, there are also downsides to the shift away from the ESS's more universalist approach. A potential danger is that of 'forum shopping', whereby great powers will only selectively engage in those fora that best serve their interests. Thereby, they might play off smaller states or institutions against each other. Instead of increasing the predictability of global governance and taming powerful actors, the more flexible use of multilateral institutions as advocated for by the EUGS might thus exacerbate the existing challenges of multipolarity, legitimacy and fragmentation and negatively affect the multilateral system at large.[157] Furthermore, the abandonment of 'effective multilateralism' as one of the most well-established and recognised concepts of EU foreign policy might have negative consequences from a strategic point of view by

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[152] EUISS and NIC, *Global Governance 2025: At a Critical Juncture*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2010, p. 17.
[153] L. Van Schaik and B. ter Haar, "Why the EU is not Promoting Effective Multilateralism: On a Fundamental Flaw in the European Security Strategy", *Clingendael Policy Brief*, no. 21, Clingendael Institute, The Hague, June 2013, p. 1.
[154] R. Penttilä, "Multilateralism Light: The Rise of Informal International Governance", *EU2020 Essay*, Centre for European Reform, London, July 2009.
[155] *Ibid*., p. 2.
[156] *Ibid.*
[157] Laatikanen, *op. cit*., p. 484.

confusing allies or negatively affecting the EU's image as an unconditional supporter of multilateralism.[158]

'Effective global governance' is also a reflection of the EUGS's shift towards 'principled pragmatism' as a new meta-narrative of EU foreign policy. However, in many regards this shift is not such a radical innovation as it might appear at first sight. Indeed, the recognition that the EU is and should not only be a normative power goes back at least to the Lisbon Treaty, which marked the EU's ambition to become a more internationally recognised player.[159] Moreover, it is the result of the gradual and reluctant recognition that the internal, regional and global environment has become more hostile compared to 2003 and that the EU is no longer – if it ever was – in a position to inspire and teach others how to be a responsible international player.[160] Concerning multilateralism, the shift towards 'effective global governance' has been a long process of eventually overcoming a long-standing "existential" attitude at the UN characterised by "much-needed recognition of the EU, its unique state of integration and contributions to global issues" rather than that of a constructive contributor.[161] Consequently, 'principled pragmatism' and 'effective global governance' are conceptually and logically consistent codifications and reinforcements of developments in EU foreign policy over the past decade.

Innovation 2: From Preserving to Transforming the Multilateral System

The EUGS clearly goes beyond the 2003 ESS and its 2008 implementation report in terms of emphasising the need to transform instead of preserving or merely reforming the multilateral system. It also seeks to enhance the EU's representation in international organisations and to establish mechanisms for global governance in areas deemed under-regulated.

However, these considerably bold ambitions come without much substance or concrete examples. Thus, it remains largely unclear what the notions of reforming, widening, developing and partnering mean in practice. It also remains unclear how a transformed multilateral system would look like at large, what the modalities of more specific reform initiatives in certain areas or international organisations would be, and

[158] Interview with EEAS official 4, *op. cit.*
[159] Interview with EEAS official 2, *op. cit.*
[160] Interview with Nathalie Tocci, *op. cit.*
[161] D. Zaru and C.-M. Geurts, "Legal Framework of EU Participation in Global Human Rights Governance", in J. Wouters *et al.* (eds.), *The European Union and Multilateral Governance*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, p. 61.

how this transformation can be achieved in light of a "more connected, contested and complex" global environment.[162]

Furthermore, the EUGS's bold call for transformation begs the question of feasibility, thus of how well-positioned the EU is to successfully advance such issues globally. Optimistically, it can be argued that the Lisbon Treaty has significantly strengthened the EU's potential to act externally. After the EEAS's complicated institutional merger and build-up, the Service and its inter-institutional and external relations are more consolidated by now. Additionally, Mogherini has enhanced the visibility and influence of the role of the HR/VP. While the EU still takes time to come up with common positions in international organisations, once it has a position, it tends to be strong and can mobilise the support of aligned and non-aligned countries next to the already 28 votes and voices of its own members.[163] Despite falling short of the initial expectations, the UNGA Resolution to upgrade the EU's status brought about tangible improvements and was an important learning process for the EEAS.[164]

Nevertheless, there are many questions about the feasibility of the EUGS's stated ambition to transform the multilateral system. Internally, the EU and its member states face a fundamental dilemma of collective action: They recognise that they benefit from their current over-representation in the multilateral system, but know that if the system fails to change, it risks being eroded. Yet, in most cases there is no internal consensus on the modalities of reform beyond technical issues, in particular concerning the UNSC.[165] The lack of detail, strategy and vision of the 2012 Barroso-Ashton Strategy illustrates this shortcoming.[166] Instead, EU member states follow a "*have cake and eat it too* attitude" at the UN according to which they call for reform, but are unwilling to give up power.[167] For Penttilä, this makes the EU in fact "one of the biggest obstacles to the reform of multilateral organisations".[168]

All this starkly contrasts with the EUGS's aspiration to position the EU as a positive force for change of the multilateral system, which recognises the legitimate aspirations

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[162] EEAS, *The European Union in a Changing Global Environment*, *op. cit*.
[163] Interview with EEAS official 4, *op. cit.*
[164] Interview with EEAS official 2, *op. cit.*
[165] Interview with EEAS official 4, *op. cit.*
[166] Wouters, Chané and Odermatt, *op. cit*., p. 6.
[167] E. Drieskens, L. Van Dievel and Y. Reykers, "The EU's Search for Effective Participation at the UN General Assembly and the UN Security Council", in: E. Drieskens and L. Van Schaik (eds.), *The EU and Effective Multilateralism: Internal and External Reform Practices*, London, Routledge, 2014, p. 29.
[168] Penttilä, *op. cit*., p. 38.

of emerging powers and contributes meaningfully to global problem solving.[169] In this sense, it is debatable whether the EUGS's depiction of the "emergence of alternative groupings" as necessarily "detrimental" to the EU is strategically wise if the EU is to constructively engage and reach agreement on reform issues with emerging powers.[170] Ujvari correctly points out that this approach is also "at odds with the EU's former calls on the emerging powers to undertake increased responsibilities on the international stage".[171]

Externally, there are additional challenges undermining the EU's potential to become a change agent for the transformation of the multilateral system as envisioned by the EUGS. For instance, legal issues of membership provisions in international organisations and conventions require the EU to lobby third parties for support and if necessary engage in legal arguments to improve the conditions for EU external representation. Yet, as demonstrated by the 2011 UNGA Resolution, these undertakings are time- and resource-consuming and stretch the EEAS's limited capacity. Moreover, they are met with political resistance by third states (not only by emerging powers but also by 'core partners' such as the US).[172]

Sometimes international organisations themselves are reluctant to allow for the enhancement of the EU's status, too. For instance, the IMF at which the EUGS explicitly seeks to establish a unified Eurozone representation has in the past been sceptical about an upgrade arguing that it "remains a country-based institution and [that] the Eurozone countries remain individually accountable to fulfil their obligations to the Fund".[173] Through the example of the UN, Wouters, Chané and Odermatt illustrate the broader external challenge that "the gaps between the EU's status in most UN bodies and its competences and priorities significantly hinder the effective representation of the Union".[174]

Considering these internal and external challenges, Tocci confirms that in-between the lines the EUGS's bold call for change can be seen as an implicit wake-up call to EU member states. This call seeks to convey that in order to preserve their

[169] Interview with EEAS official 2, *op. cit.*
[170] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., p. 39.
[171] Ujvari, *The EU Global Strategy*, *op. cit*., p. 3.
[172] Wouters, Chané and Odermatt, *op. cit*.
[173] J. Wouters and S. Van Kerckhoven, "The International Monetary Fund", in K. E. Jørgensen and K. V. Laatikainen (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions: Performance, Policy, Power*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012, pp. 222-223.
[174] Wouters, Chané and Odermatt, *op. cit*., p. 26.

own influence and that of traditional multilateral institutions, EU member states need to get their act together.[175] The EUGS implicitly suggests that this would entail giving up power as individual member states in international organisations, accommodating other actors' interests – particularly those of emerging powers –, and rallying behind a more joined-up external representation.

In sum, the EUGS seems to have gone as far as politically possible in calling for a progressive role of the EU in the inevitable transformation process of the multilateral system. Considering the above arguments, however, the challenges identified undermine the possibility for the EU to assume this role in practice. Due to the lack of agreement beyond the general direction, the EUGS's progressive stance was most likely only possible at the expense of precision. Therefore, the successful implementation concerning the transformation of the multilateral system will hinge on enhanced consensus and shared understanding among member states.

Innovation 3: From Selective Partnerships to Inclusive Partnering

Centred around the notion of 'partnering', the EUGS recognises the EU's declining relative influence and the limits of what it can achieve alone. Consequently, it makes an unprecedentedly clear case for stepping up the range and degree of cooperation for pursuing European interests, but also for solving global problems in a principled and pragmatic way. This includes partnering with non-state actors and overhauling the EU's overly-institutionalised 'strategic partnerships'.

The strength of this approach is that it provides a strong narrative of the EU as "an agenda-shaper, a connector, coordinator and facilitator within a networked web of players".[176] Additionally, the EUGS's approach of 'partnering' convincingly embraces the promotion of cooperative regional orders and a case-by-case process of selecting partners based on what they can contribute to a specific issue at hand. Thereby, the EUGS resolves some of the tensions that previously existed under the ESS between universalist 'effective multilateralism' on the one hand and promoting regionalisation and 'strategic partnerships' on the other hand.

While convincing conceptually, the new approach of 'partnering' lacks substance. Apart from the case of cyber, in which the necessity to cooperate with the private sector is rather obvious, there is a lack of examples of and ideas about how

[175] Interview with Nathalie Tocci, *op. cit.*
[176] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., p. 43.

the EU can, for instance, meaningfully engage with non-state actors in global governance. This is illustrative of the fact that the EU has no prominent precedent and little experience in doing so.[177] More strategic thinking, internal deliberations and institutional learning are required if the EUGS's call for "more innovative forms of engagement" beyond "dialogue" and "support" is to become reality.[178]

Moreover, devising and implementing strategies for such innovative engagement and maintaining ongoing relations with a larger and more diverse range of actors beyond states and traditional international organisations requires significant capacity and resources. Yet, the EEAS, whose staff number roughly corresponds to that of a medium-sized member state, has become a victim of its own success in terms of taking over more tasks from member states, albeit without corresponding increases in capacity and resources.[179] As a result, on multilateral issues the EEAS's focus is rather on keeping up with developments in traditional international organisations, particularly the UN,[180] than on devising ambitious strategies on how to engage with a wider range of actors. While it was noted that the engagement with these actors also provides an opportunity to tap into their resources and use them as multipliers, it was simultaneously recognised that the EU, and particularly the EEAS, is currently not in a position to do so.[181] This assessment significantly undermines the prospect of living up to the aspirations of the EUGS in the area of 'partnering'.

Conclusion

In this paper I have analysed the EU's approach towards multilateralism as presented in the 2016 EUGS and assessed in how far it differs from that of its predecessor, the 2003 ESS. My analysis identified three major innovations. First, whereas in the ESS 'effective multilateralism' was both the means and end of the EU's approach towards multilateralism, the EUGS adopts 'effective global governance' as a new means for achieving a rules-based global order. While comprising of 'effective multilateralism', 'effective global governance' entails more than that and is a qualitatively different concept that renders the EU's approach more flexible and issue-driven. Second, the EUGS goes beyond the ESS in terms of seeking to transform rather than preserve the multilateral system. It also sends an implicit wake-up call to EU member states urging

[177] Interview with EEAS official 1, Bruges, 10 March 2017.
[178] EEAS, *EUGS*, *op. cit*., p. 18.
[179] Interview with EEAS official 4, *op. cit.*
[180] Interview with EEAS official 3, *op. cit.*
[181] Interview with EEAS official 2, *op. cit.*

them to become part of that change to avoid the erosion of the system. Finally, the EUGS shifts the concept of partnership from a more selective and principled approach, based on universal multilateralism and selected 'strategic partners' in the ESS, towards a more inclusive notion of 'partnering' with a wider range of actors in a more pragmatic way.

These findings have important implications for the study of the EU in the multilateral system and as a foreign policy actor at large. To start with, the assumption that the EU unconditionally and primordially supports multilateral approaches has become questionable and needs to be reconsidered. The same applies to 'effective multilateralism' as a foreign policy doctrine. While 'effective multilateralism' is still an important foreign policy goal and remains the EU's preferred approach, it is no longer perceived sufficient for advancing the EU's interests and addressing global problems. Instead, a case-by-case approach that includes both formal and informal institutions as well as state and non-state actors is deemed necessary for the EU to prevail in a 'more connected, contested, and complex' environment. Therefore, as argued above, 'effective multilateralism' no longer covers the entire "triangle of principles–means–ends", which according to Lazarou *et al.* constitutes a doctrine.[182]

Moreover, the EUGS further side-lines the notion of 'strategic partnerships'. This reflects the gradual recognition that the overly institutionalised way of trying to engage such partners failed to provide tangible outcomes. The EUGS implicitly confirms this assessment and lays the ground for reconceptualising the way in which the EU seeks to engage particularly with emerging powers under the broader notion of 'partnering'. It is also the first time that an official EU foreign policy document grants extensive attention to non-state actors as important players in global governance.

For Legrand, the combination of soft power with the unprecedented emphasis on hard power makes the EUGS represent "a major shift in European foreign policy thinking".[183] This shift is embodied by 'principled pragmatism' as the new 'meta-narrative' of the EU's foreign policy. For Techau, the EUGS manages to "strike a fine balance between reduced and increased ambition".[184] Combined with the new meta-narrative, this is certainly one of the biggest achievements of the EUGS. This

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[182] Lazarou *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[183] J. Legrand, *Does the New EU Global Strategy Deliver on Security and Defence?*, In-Depth Analysis, DGEXPO/B/PolDep/Note/2016_243, PE570.472, Brussels, European Parliament, Directorate General External Policies of the Union, September 2016, p. 17.
[184] J. Techau, "The EU's New Global Strategy: Useful or Pointless?", Carnegie Europe, 1 July 2016.

balance is also directly reflected as such in the approach towards multilateralism, which recognises the limits of promoting universal multilateralism while at the same time stepping up the ambition in terms of seeking to transform the system and expanding partnerships.

While the overall narrative and the three innovations of the EUGS's approach towards multilateralism are conceptually consistent and respond well to the changing global environment and the criticism of 'effective multilateralism', the analysis casts doubts upon the EU currently being in a strong position to transform the multilateral system and to engage in more ambitious, innovative and open partnerships. Concerning the ambition to transform the multilateral system, the challenges consist of an internal dilemma of collective action as well as external political resistance and legal hurdles. The ambition to engage in new forms of partnerships is undermined by capacity shortcomings. Additionally, both innovations suffer from a lack of substance and imagination, which are partly due to disagreements between member states. To be fair, the broad nature of a Global Strategy does not allow for much detail, and its vagueness can also serve as an advantage by granting it more flexibility in the implementation.[185] Nevertheless, based on the insights derived from the interviews and other official documents, namely that this precision and ideas do not currently seem to exist outside the EUGS, further strategic thinking and planning, institutional learning, and research are all the more required.

Based on these findings, the upcoming prioritised implementation of the EU's new approach towards multilateralism should focus on forging consensus between EU member states on the modalities of reform of major international organisations, including the UNSC and the IFIs, and of the multilateral system at large. This includes the explicit recognition of the dilemma of giving up power versus risking to erode multilateral institutions and requires individual EU member states to rally behind a more joined-up external representation and accommodate the aspirations of emerging powers and developing countries. It also entails the necessity to develop a common, pro-active approach towards new multilateral institutions, such as the AIIB, to integrate rather than isolate them and encourage the adoption of established norms and procedures. Finally, European policy makers need to further conceptualise and put into practice innovative, inclusive and integrated ways of engaging with civil society and the private sector in global governance.

[185] Interview with EEAS official 2, *op. cit.*

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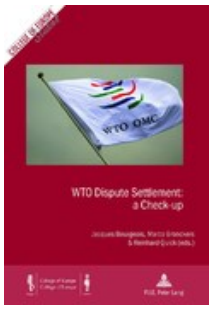

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