

18 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Nick Witney

Co-director of European Power programme
European Council on Foreign Relations

Creating an EU Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) is a necessary exercise. Achieving more of a shared world view among the EU's 28 member states, and a greater shared understanding of when and how Europeans should pull together, is an essential pre-condition for common action. Above all, this requires realism.

The need for realism

The dramatic global power shifts of the last decade have punctured Europeans' preferred view of themselves as an ascendant soft-superpower. We were engaging in 'effective multilateralism' with 'strategic partners', and assimilating our 'neighbourhood' as part of a liberal, democratic, rules-based world.

Up until now, the current EUGS review process has done a good job of describing how the world – now more connected, contested and complex – has changed. But even since last summer the EU's position has deteriorated further, with the outside world now impinging on everyday European life through issues such as terrorism and the migra-

tion crisis – with European solidarity as collateral damage.

If, then, the EUGS itself is to pass its key test – that it actually influences policymakers in national capitals – it must be both clear-eyed and hard-headed. There are several examples of where realism is particularly needed.

No draw-bridge option for migration – Unless we are prepared to watch people drown and to mine our land borders, the facts of geography, and long-standing intermingling of populations, mean that there is no way Europe can insulate itself from the conflicts and crises of the Middle East and Africa. Whatever is done to 'strengthen control of our external borders', whether nationally or collectively, Fortress Europe is unachievable.

Serious, committed efforts for stability and prosperity in the 'countries of origin and transit' is therefore essential. Military means must be used, as well as aid and trade, but intelligently – terrorism may be drawn to Europe by ill-judged military action abroad.

The US matters more than ever – The US has seen its influence wane along with Europe, to the extent that it is no longer the world’s sole hyper-power. But Silicon Valley, the shale revolution, and favourable demography all contribute to vast enduring strengths. To keep the Russians out of Europe, we continue to need to keep the Americans in: and the future health of the transatlantic alliance will depend on Europeans doing more for their own defence, and taking up the slack as the US pivots to Asia by being more active in our own ‘backyard’.

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Strong transatlantic relations also requires the implementation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – but must avoid the sort of slavish adherence to US instructions that served us so ill in Afghanistan, for example. With the West on the back foot, the two sides of the Atlantic need each other more than ever – allowing scope for a less co-dependent relationship.

Tension between values and interests – Of course, European foreign policy must be values-based. It is ‘who we are’, it is in our treaties. It is therefore essential to sustain liberalism within Europe. But there will often be occasions when self-interest – particularly economic, at a time of imperfect recovery from the last decade’s financial crisis – trumps principle. This is evident in, for example, our relations with China, or the bilateral relations of many member states with Gulf states. The strategy will be more plausible if it frankly acknowledges this tension.

It should also point out that Europe cannot reasonably expect 100% conformity with its own values set. Arab electorates, for example, consistently opt for mildly Islamist governments who often have attitudes towards women and gays most Europeans find deplorable. But we need to respect their choices and support future Morsis. Otherwise, we are left

with Sisi or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

Still an economic superpower – Despite everything, Europe remains an economic superpower – and, happily, that matters more in today’s world. Competition between major powers is increasingly being conducted through the means of geoeconomics as opposed to old geopolitical tools. Europe should understand and embrace the political potential of its economic instruments.

It is the member states that matter – Aid and trade, the main economic instruments, are Commission ‘competences’. But the EU’s foreign and defence policy is essentially intergovernmental; for better or worse, it is the European Council that has been pre-eminently the place where the EU’s successive crises have been handled, or not.

There is no hope for an effective external strategy unless the member states set aside the destructive ‘competition’ between southern and eastern security concerns. Examples such as Portugal flying combat air patrols over the Baltic states, and Latvia sending soldiers to the Central African Republic should be applauded and such efforts further encouraged.

The member states must rediscover the virtues of solidarity and remember that it is not always a matter of everyone acting together: it is often a question of small-group cooperation, supported by others or just accommodated in the spirit of ‘constructive abstention’.

