



A European *Global Security Strategy*: Offering Seven-League Boots to Become a Global Actor

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In mid-2012 the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden took the initiative to launch the debate on a “European Global Strategy” and invited think tanks to set up a dialogue leading to the delivery of a report by May 2013.

This paper will argue that the objective should be to pave the way for political discussions at the highest level and eventually the adoption by the European Council of a global security strategy. It is labelled “global” to indicate that this strategy is not only dealing with the EU’s Foreign, Security, and Defence Policies, CFSP and CSDP *sensu stricto*, but is to encapsulate all security aspects related to EU external action. In other words, a *European Global Security Strategy* (EGSS) should be aimed at.

The initiative is at present attracting positive attention in most if not all of the other European capitals, as well as in EU institutional circles. However there is some fear that the project will entail unproductive theoretical discussions, preventing any practical progress in CFDP and CSDP and is therefore, in view of the December Council summit of Defence, questionable.

But an EGSS is more about fostering swift decision-making at critical moments and eliminating stumbling blocks at present causing a standstill in CFSP and CSDP as well as in other critical areas - related to security. A strategy without means is indeed a hallucination. However, expecting Heads of State and Government to free up budgets for “required civil and military capabilities” without consensus on the aims, is rather naive. Breaking this vicious circle is essential. Moreover an EGSS is “the” instrument to translate the EU mantra on “comprehensive crisis management” into practice. It is also to avoid that in the future the Union would be confronted with crisis management operations in which so few have to do so much in the name of so many, leaving public opinion with the question what “Europe” really is about.

THE SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS

1) To act or not to act, with premeditation

The main purpose of a security strategy is to provide guidance for the development of longer term policies to protect commonly agreed values and interests, built on a shared view of the key threats. Its more practical value is to support the political leadership in decision-making when confronted with the question whether it is appropriate for the EU

to launch an operation or to take some specific action in order to cope with particular events endangering its security.

The outbreak of a crisis is not the ideal moment to start a debate on whether in this particular event any robust action from the EU is a priority or not, and subsequently to develop from scratch a series of potential ad hoc strategies, while at the same time the window for preventive action is closing.

The EGSS is to foster a common understanding on when the threshold for robust action is reached and when to trigger pre-planned scenarios. The aim is to ease preventive action, make possible urgent action, and to ensure global coherence within the Union and among Member States.

Obtaining durable results is of the essence. This implies that at all times the political objectives of specific CSDP operations and EU programmes dealing with security must be part and parcel of a comprehensive approach derived from a longer-term strategy, from a longer-term desired political end-state.

However, the principal goal of an EGSS is to ensure the ultimate desired political outcome is reached step by step.

2) Political and public support

The EGSS will be a working document for all of the EU institutions, in particular the Council, the Commission and the EEAS, and is to inspire Member States. But it is also to become a public document.

The EGSS has the vocation to create broad awareness on European security aspects and to stimulate the debate, not only within EU institutions, the EP and National Parliaments, but also among public opinion. The objective is to gain political and public support.

The EGSS is not to become a highly

technical nor a detailed document, rather an overarching guideline from which subsequently a series of more detailed sub-strategies are to be derived.

Ideally it should be composed of a limited number of short and sharp paragraphs. An easy read, providing the general background to better understand why at given times some political decisions are taken to safeguard our common European values and interests.

3) Continuity – A European Security Strategy Plus

The European Security Strategy published in 2003 is still a valid document. The European Global Security Strategy is to incorporate it, and to complement and update it. Since then the world has changed, and so has the Union.

Where the 2003 ESS, a daring document at the time, was stipulating “how” the Union should tackle security issues, the EGSS is now to address all other aspects characterising a security strategy, in particular who is to do what, where, and with which means. Moreover, it is to provide specific guidelines on military, civilian-military and civilian operations. But the scope has to be broadened even more, beyond the traditional 3 D approach even. We are at present witnessing a growing “economization” of security. This requires that economic governance and related policies be considered as well.

4) Means to the ends

The objective of the EGSS is to enable the EU to steer events so as to protect our common objectives. The power of the EU to influence other relevant actors on the world scene or to manage specific global threats is not equal to the sum of all of the separate instruments, assets and capabilities Europeans are able to mobilise. When confronted with specific issues, the weakest link will determine the outcome. There are instruments of hard and soft power, but hard or soft power as such is

inexistent. There is only power. Real power lies in a holistic and tailored approach and the ability to mobilise all of the required means at the right moment.

It is common wisdom that preventive action requires considerably less means. Whenever decisions to intervene have to be taken within a number of days or even less, it is vital to have a strategy ensuring that the instruments and the necessary stand-by assets are available at all times.

No matter how good a strategy may look on paper, without means it remains a paper. Up-front identifying of the required means is of the essence. With the exception of procedures and assets for urgent action, most of the indispensable means to launch CSDP operations have been identified more than a decade ago, as well as the ever persisting strategic shortfalls. “Pooling” shortfalls is regrettably not an option. “Sharing” frustration is one. Developing a common strategy to solve them is better one.

The EGSS is to bridge goals and means. Only when at the political level there is a clear vision on the ends to pursue, will the debate on priorities, shortfalls and redundancies and, finally, on budgets gather substance.

5) First priority: Overall coherence

History, geography, and new emerging threats all have their respective rights to influence priorities. Within the Union this has led to the development of a series of Strategic Partnerships and of specific policies, such as the one on the Neighbourhood. However, in this context the word “strategic” is merely put forward to underline the importance of the matter, not necessarily to point to a strategic approach.

At present the EEAS is developing sub-strategies, each time focused on a specific region, such as the Sahel or the Horn of Africa.

However, when push comes to shove not all Member States seem to consider themselves all that concerned.

It is clear that this very constructive bottom-up approach has reached its limits and is in need of an overarching framework.

Moreover, nothing but an overarching strategy can do away with the ongoing and rather unproductive debate on the priority to be given to a particular region or to a particular global security threat. Security is indivisible. If there is a common understanding on the values and interests to defend as well as on a common threat analysis - all essential parts of an EGSS - responses to be given to raising events will become more obvious.

6) The EEAS as facilitator and coordinator

The EEAS is indeed to be seen as the EU coordinator on foreign policy but also as an actor at the EU level to some extent equivalent to the National Security Council and the National Economic Council in the US as far as their work on security aspects is related to foreign policy and international economic issues. Within the EU, the EEAS is the indicated forum for considering European security matters at large, to advise on actions to be taken and to coordinate the implementation of policies among the various actors, the EU institutions and the Member States.

The coordinating role of the EEAS is not to be compared solely to a Foreign Office at EU level. Its scope has to go beyond the traditional Diplomacy, Development and Defence. The potential security aspects of other policies for which the EU has competence, e.g. trade, industry, competition and even agriculture, protection of data and intelligence gathering, have also to be considered. A permanent dialogue with Member States on these issues is indicated as well. The context and the division of labour is to be provided by a commonly agreed EGSS.

7) Political ownership and permanent steering

It is vital that all actors involved have ownership of the EGSS. If it is perceived as “just another document” from either the Commission or the EEAS, or as just an initiative from “some” Member States, the added value will be negligible.

The process towards an EGSS should ensure that all Members States, regardless of size, be part of the discussion and decision-making. In the end, for Member States it is about regaining sovereignty on a level able to cope with the common problems of security, similar to all other EU policies developed so far. And these particular common problems are indeed sensitive. Urgent as well.

A global security strategy, actions and investment related to security, to civil and military operations are “Chefsache”. Therefore it is vital that discussions on an EGSS and its final adoption take place at the level of Heads of State and Government and are based on the broadest consensus. It is important to draw the right lessons from operations such as in Libya and in Mali, including on the absence of any shared security strategy.

It is obvious that an EGSS - as is the case for each and every security strategy - has to be the subject of regular political attention and regular updates, at least once every EU legislative term. An annual “State of the Union” on global security provided by the President of the Council and the President of the Commission is deemed appropriate as well.

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