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The Role of the European Union in the World

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Despite the hopes raised by the most recent Treaties, the Lisbon Treaty in particular, the European Union has been unable to strengthen, let alone develop its role on the international stage. A couple of weeks away from the European Parliament elections, we need to ask ourselves what can reasonably be done by the upcoming Parliament to ensure that significant progress is made with respect to the EU's foreign policy.

Some of this progress could result from the implementation of the European Security Strategy or originate from the role and initiatives of the High Representative/Vice-president of the Commission. In addition, rethinking specific approaches could allow for significant improvements in key areas such as the EU's dealings with neighbouring countries, its commercial relationship with the US, its energy security or its common security and defence policy.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, preoccupied by the debt crisis, the fragility of its financial institutions, the fight it wages for growth and against unemployment, and the rise of populism, the European Union (EU) failed to strengthen, let alone increase its influence and presence on the international stage.

Therefore, a couple of weeks before European citizens are called to exercise their great democratic right to elect a new European Parliament, the big question is this: in light of harsh realities and past failures, what can reasonably be done by the next Parliament to make significant progress with the Union's foreign policy?

THE DECLINE OF EUROPE

The reasons of this decline are no secret. However, the degradation of its economic impact relative to the significant growth of emerging markets should be mentioned. These emerging markets used market capitalism bolstered by information technologies to create economic and social development of exceptional speed and scope, thus greatly reducing poverty.

It did not take long for a complete reshuffle of global geopolitics to follow.

Europe, having lost much of its former technological upper hand and having to bear the high cost of its social model, is clearly losing a lot of its competitiveness on global markets.

It no longer is a matter of strengthening the EU's place in the world, but a question of restoring it. To that end, the consolidation of the single currency would be the place to start because the euro's equivalence to the deutschmark has allowed it to keep its credibility. To make its voice heard, the EU's only alternative is to prioritise the exit from the financial, economic and social crisis and to consolidate the single currency. Succeeding at both these tasks requires greater political integration, and an increase in shared monetary, economic, fiscal and social sovereignty also calls for stronger democratic legitimacy within the EU.

A lot of hope was placed in the political role and influence of the EU in the world when the Maastricht Treaty was signed, because it institutionalised the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). This treaty was a political statement in answer to the upheaval of the European continent: the fall of the Soviet Union, the democratisation of Eastern and Central European countries, of the Balkans, and the German reunification to mention only the main events : it revealed just how much appeal was generated by a forward-thinking Europe.

This treaty established specific objectives for the EU's foreign policy and served as a base for the gradual improvement of these objectives until the Lisbon Treaty, which brought together all of the EU's external action objectives under Art. 21. For example, we should mention:

- Safekeeping the EU's values, fundamental interests, safety, independence, and integrity;

- Consolidating and upholding democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the principles of international law;
- Preserving the peace, preventing conflicts and strengthening international security. Quite a big undertaking!

These three objectives bear testimony to the very high hopes placed in the EU by its Members States. It seems obvious that 20 years later, the results are few and far between, and a far cry from what had been announced.

It's true that the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) was created at the dawn of the violent uprisings that would be characteristic of the post-Cold War era: ethnic cleansing in ex-Yugoslavia, the Rwandan genocide, the reprisal of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities on top of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Iraq war, and more recently the wars in Libya, Syria and Mali. In all of these conflicts, the EU most often proved itself powerless, absent, or spectacularly divided as was the case over Iraq or the military operations in Libya.

This track record is clearly a negative one, and above all it reveals the disagreements between Member States over the needs, aims and content of a foreign policy for the EU. It also reveals the Europeans' predilection for institutional commitment and convoluted flow charts, for legal subtleties with no operational impact like constructive abstention, and for diplomatic interventions made of sweeping, high-flying statements illustrated by the numerous common positions that emerge from the Council of the EU as well as innumerable conclusions about major international crises originating from European Councils.

The main lesson to be learned here is that the objectives set out in the Treaties cannot be met because of three reasons: the insufficiency of the operational capabilities of both the Union and its Members States, the predominance of the

intergovernmental procedure, and the cumbersome decision-taking procedures. Therefore, there is a real possibility that the EU will be marginalised on the international stage, where only the main Member States could hope to remain at the forefront; but even then, for how long?

EXISTING STRENGTHS

Despite this loss of economic and political influence, there is no denying that the EU possesses a wide array of strengths to play a definite role in world affairs.

The first thing to consider is that the EU derives its visibility and influence on the world stage from its unity on subjects such as its trade policy, competition policy, and the standards it sets for the world's largest market.

As the first economic power for some time yet, it also has the world's second leading currency and spreads over lands that hold 500 million citizens who benefit from high living standards and a social model sought after throughout the world.

Demographically, the European population is ageing and stagnating, but in this it is not alone. In 2050, the EU will still be more populated than the US, remaining in the third place of global rankings behind India and China. The EU attracts significant migratory flows, and is the main source and destination of tourists in the world.

As member of both the G8 and G20, the EU is the largest donor of development aid in the world and has imposed itself as a key player in the development of the south. The consensus on cooperation commits Member States to a common set of values and principles. In addition to this, it also has one of the world's most efficient humanitarian intervention

departments in the Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department of the EC.

Last but not least, the EU is a powerful and influential source of cultural innovation and creation. It is seen by a large slice of humanity as a model of democracy, stability, and solidarity.

AVAILABLE INSTRUMENTS

These are undeniable facts, but the EU is equipped with a set of tools to act on the world stage that is far from negligible and that only needs to be put to better use.

Its external relations policy instruments are among its most notable. For a number of years now, this policy implemented by the Commission has enabled the development of economic relations thanks to hundreds of international agreements, and it has secured the reliable and influential presence of the EU in a great number of countries.

Supported by its 140 or so delegations in the world's capitals and largest international organisations, it has a steady and definite global presence with its multiple common policies. We already mentioned two of these, both essential: its trade policy and its development aid policy. We should also mention the external dimensions of the environment, agriculture and fisheries, transport, energy, research and development, and migration policies.

With the Lisbon Treaty, these delegations went from being delegations of the European Commission to being delegations of the European Union, and gained additional foreign policy responsibilities under the authority of the new European External Action Service and the High Representative/Vice-president of the Commission. This is an active administration that implements the international agreements at the core of European diplomacy. As the sole representatives of the EU, these heads of

delegation have gained in visibility and efficiency.

In the toolbox at the EU's disposal can also be found a number of instruments and prerogatives of the CFSP and the CSDP that were added between the Maastricht Treaty and the Lisbon Treaty, and that are just waiting to be put to better use.

On the basis of these treaties, a number of improvements took place. This does not purport to be an exhaustive list, but the following are worth mentioning as examples: the Berlin Plus agreement, and the 1999 Washington NATO Summit that put NATO means and capabilities at the disposal of the EU, notably for the planning of operations in which the Alliance does not involve itself (ALTHEA Operation in Bosnia, 2009).

Let us also recall the decisions of the December 1999 Helsinki European Council that made the deployment of military forces numbering between 50.000 and 60.000 people possible. The ambition was high: giving the Union the means to remain on the field for as long as necessary. Although this project has not been implemented, it is good that it exists.

Finally, let us evoke the Lisbon Treaty, which enables the Council to entrust an operation to a group of Member States that have the required means to act. This Treaty also implements permanent and structured cooperation procedures for defence purposes, more flexible than those in place for enhanced cooperation.

As noted, this is a poor track record and the potential of these tools and initiatives has not been put to good use. This is mostly due to political reasons, as the EU is currently unable to agree on a real foreign policy. The EU will probably never be a classical power with a common foreign policy and defence policy. Several times over, Jacques Delors indicated that

formulating a CFSP would still require a lengthy intellectual and political coming of age.

NECESSARY IMPROVEMENTS WITHIN GRASP

European Security Strategy

The first priority for the next European policy-makers will be to put forward, get approved, and implement a European Security Strategy that will set the priorities in terms of foreign policy objectives and the EU's place in the world.

We are not starting from scratch. The European Security Strategy of 2003 was the Europeans' first attempt at defining their strategic environment and selecting the fundamental priorities of their foreign policy: an affinity for multilateralism, prioritising the Union's neighbour relations in response to its geopolitical vision, and the will to commit to the management of crises both at the civilian and military levels.

It has now been over 10 years. The Union should rethink the conceptual framework and update the content of this 2003 attempt, combining the Community's external policy with diplomatic and military action. Vision and strategy are key elements of the credibility of European external action, and vital to the building of trust between Member States and to the increased coherence of their initiatives. This common project needs to be redefined, not to overwhelm Member States with the creation of a Westphalian Union, but to replace what divides us with the interdependencies and the solidarity on which our survival depends. There is no reason why what was accomplished thanks to the impetus of Javier Solana could not be updated and repeated. The EU would benefit greatly from clarifying what is at stake, explaining what the dangers are, and refining its approach and priorities. The visibility of EU

internal and external initiatives would improve significantly. Let's get to work!

This is no easy task because the challenge is to demonstrate in concrete terms how the interests and values of the European peoples are threatened, and more importantly, which strategies and initiatives will allow us to meet those threats and protect our interests to the best of our ability. The recent and serious developments in Ukraine only add to the need for such a process.

Putting the current toolbox to better use: the role of the High Representative

At this point, wide ranging institutional adjustments or reform would be very difficult to achieve, which means that the design of the external policy will only mature if current capabilities and instruments are put to better use. For example, I will expand on what I believe to be the most promising path, namely the possibilities offered by the Lisbon Treaty with regards to the office of High Representative and its prerogatives.

The innovative approach of the Lisbon Treaty and initiatives such as the High Representative's prerogatives and the creation of the External Action Service did not produce the expected results. Progress is urgently needed in the near future. This can be achieved. Remember that the High Representative is the Vice-President of the Commission and that as such, he is capable of ensuring the better coordination of Community policies and their external impact. Much remains to be done - and can be done - to ensure the consistent and coordinated presence of these policies outside of our borders.

In addition to this, the High Representative presides over the Foreign Affairs Council. This prerogative and responsibility enables him or her to direct the work of the Council for 5 years, and thus to produce a roadmap setting out the

topics that need to be discussed during that time. The point would be to establish common stances feeding into a doctrine and a European identity relative to concerns with universal appeal. Would it be that difficult to establish a common stance to agree on a strategy with Mr Putin's Russia or for our future dealings with Africa? There are many areas of interest for which the EU could develop and settle its own stance at little expense. This would result in a clear European doctrine, with a consolidated identity, and improved visibility and external capabilities. It would be worth a try to bring together the Member States with the strongest disagreements to see if they can find topics they can agree on, outside of the usual 28 Member States-strong meetings, and maybe identify points of consensus.

There is no doubt that to coordinate European Commission policies (in their external dimension), to preside over the Foreign Affairs Council or to exercise his or her authority relative to the CFSP/CSDP, the High Representative must gain in efficiency and influence by being able to rely on the independence of the External Action Service from any and all actions of the Commission and Member States. To achieve this, the High Representative should be given the effective authority to coordinate the services that contribute to the Union's external action. This is a case where progress is possible provided that existing instruments are used to their fullest extent.

RETHINKING SOME APPROACHES

The EU and its neighbours

Enlargement policy remains of the main instruments of the elusive « Foreign and Security Policy ». This policy has already made it possible for the EU to contribute to the stability and economic development of many of its

neighbouring countries, and consequently became a major vector of the EU's influence. Although the prospect of accession cannot be the only instrument in the European neighbourhood policy arsenal, it is worth underlining that it has not yet lost all of its political power.

Nevertheless, several points of the EU's enlargement strategy should be revised. It can only become more efficient and more legitimate by going through legal, social, and political adjustments. Faced with the naivety and political rush that were characteristic of the last enlargements, what now matters is to proceed more carefully through the enlargement process, by making sure that candidates are subject to stricter controls both during the negotiations and during the actual process. It is imperative to make sure that the new countries are fully capable of respecting and functioning according to the rule of law that guarantees public freedoms.

It is probable that no other accession will take place in the next couple of years, principally for political reasons, but that possibility should be left open. A clear EU stance on the external borders of Europe should also be defined in order to prevent any further inconsiderate enlargements.

Similarly to the Eastern revolutions in recent years, the Arab Spring has led to the consolidation of another pillar of external policy, namely the « European Neighbourhood Policy », which was raised to the rank of common policy by the Lisbon Treaty. Introduced at the beginning of the years 2000, it has produced mixed results. It was meant to attract our southern and eastern neighbours with agreements based around common values, thus enabling them to improve their democratic life and economic integration with the domestic market. There is no denying that we are quite off the mark, but this has more to do with the

internal upheaval of these countries than with the political failure of neighbouring countries. Many partner countries are now facing serious political, economic, social, security, or even humanitarian crises – be it in the south with Syria, Egypt, Libya or Tunisia or to the east with Ukraine, Georgia, etc.

Many of these countries no longer have any desire to create additional ties with the EU; because of ideological reasons that often have to do with an estrangement from Western values; because they fail to see any sufficiently tangible benefits to this rapprochement; or because, like Ukraine, they are divided between those in favour of collaborating more closely with the EU, and those that want to work more closely with Russia. The very objectives of the European Neighbourhood Policy that rest on sharing values are being challenged more often than ever.

Despite these restrictions, the fact remains that the EU's relationship with its neighbours is of the utmost priority. Consequently, this policy would benefit greatly from being redirected in order to redefine the less-ambiguous, clearer stance of the EU relative to two of its key partners: Turkey and Russia.

One of the first tasks the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission should tackle with regards to the EU's neighbours will be to offer Member States a new, stronger, more realistic global strategy, better able to take into account the defence of our interests whilst making the European Union look more appealing. Once more, the EU has a good hand to deal with, both from an economic and political standpoint, provided that the Member States understand and agree to the efforts required to safeguard their long-term interests.

Trade agreement with the United States

The fight against unemployment will remain one of the major challenges of the EU, but its outcome will depend in great part on the capability of the Union to develop its external trade policy to the benefit of its needs and interests.

In this context, the decision to negotiate a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) with the United States is a major initiative because there is no such agreement between partners of this economic weight. Together the EU and the US represent close to half of the world economy and the trade that goes on between them amounts to 30% of all global trade.

The importance of such talks is due to the fact that – in addition to what is traditionally at stake with free trade agreements (reduction of tariffs, restriction of subsidies) – this project also touches upon non-tariff barriers. This key point would result in a narrowing of regulatory differences that would have a bigger impact on the increase of trade than any tariff reduction could possibly have because it would streamline multinational production chains.

How this negotiation is handled by the EU and the scope of the agreement that will be signed by the next European Parliament will have a significant economic and geopolitical impact. It will also incite Europeans to be ambitious in their promotion of regulation for regulatory convergence at the global level, beyond the United States.

The ultimate challenge will be for the EU to take advantage of the TTIP talks and to rely on a strategy of active involvement with the new economic powers to promote the allocation of the competence to monitor regulatory convergence to the WTO. This would put

regulatory convergence in a multilateral framework.

The strengthening of global governance to promote cooperation on issues relating to the environment, intellectual property, human rights or food safety is also at stake.

Energy security

Another area where the EU should and can make some progress in terms of its external policy is that of energy. In recent years, the EU has become more and more dependent on foreign countries for its needs in energy. The EU was already importing 54% of its energy in 2006 and that figure will climb to 67% in 2030. Even though most of the countries in Western Europe have diversified their energy supply geographically, others – principally countries from Central and Eastern Europe, but not only – remain completely or mostly dependent on a single supplier, namely Russia. Because of this, energy not only becomes a factor in the competitiveness and sustainable development of these countries, but also and increasingly so a factor in foreign policy. In this context, the safety of energy supply lines is crucially important to Europeans.

The diversification of supply lines is a key element of the solution. Therefore it seems essential for industrial actors to continue their search for new energy sources, as they are doing in Africa, for example. It's also necessary for the EU to speak with one voice on the international stage for energy to build useful partnerships with supplier and transit countries outside of European borders, and to find the agreements most beneficial to the whole of the EU. This would also require the development of interconnections in order to pool together some supply capabilities. The success of such a project would be a major step forward for the CSFP.

In addition to this, the EU could also adopt a stronger stance to use the numerous instruments and external action policies it can wield. Thus it would essentially be a case of putting into perspective its neighbouring policies with the East and with the South, strategic partnerships, first of all with Russia, but also its enlargement policy, notably with Turkey, or its development policy, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. It would also benefit from continuing with the systematic addition of energy objectives to its external policies. Here is a task for the next Commission and the next External Action Service.

Pragmatic approach in the Common Defence and Security Policy

The CDSO was not conceived with a mind to enter the EU in the race for military power in which the new economic powers have thrown themselves. The defence spending of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) countries has gone from 8 to 13,5% between 2001 and 2011, relative to a drop from 30% to 18% for Europeans, whereas the United States have remained at 41%.

But the traditional dichotomy between territorial defence and external intervention no longer exists. Most of the new dangers and threats are unclear and need to be dealt with outside of EU borders. The instability of the EU periphery, particularly to the south, requires a great deal of strategic planning and a shorter response time. This is made even more pressing by the willingness of the United States to withdraw from this area to focus on Asia.

Despite its meagre results, the European Council of December 2013 had the right methodology. Indeed, it resisted the appeal of grand and ambitious declarations by focusing on specific roadmaps and objectives, including among other things an accelerated agenda of 18 months before they meet again in June 2015.

The main points of improvement have to do with:

1. Military capabilities: creation of a club for users of American drones, commitment to produce European drones, development of ground resupply capabilities, etc.;
2. European industry: discussion of strategic autonomy with the objective of not having to depend on external partners for, among other things, the maintenance and spare parts of infrastructure in the industrial sector;
3. The study of the issue of external operations financing;
4. The desire to update the European Security Strategy in light of the new threats and priorities.

As recently pointed out by Etienne Davignon, the alternative of a “Europe of defense” or NATO is out of date. NATO capabilities are no longer sufficient to deal with the security concerns to the south and in the Mediterranean East, as well as the Sahel. Which collective instances of crisis management can contribute to stabilising the South should be determined. Task delegation should also be clarified within the Union, notably in the European Commission, and community rules should be adapted to the highly-specific defence market.

Of course, we are still too far from the objectives set forth by the different Treaties but the urgency of certain threats should contribute to certain decisions being taken to implement a step-by-step policy, the only possible one at this point. This policy is indispensable if we want to maintain a shred of credibility on the international stage.

CONCLUSION

If Europe has indeed lost some of its influence in the affairs of the world, both from an

economic and political standpoint, it does not change the fact that it remains a major player.

The EU's foreign policy has failed to meet the hopes it had raised, but it cannot be denied that the EU still has numerous attractive features and instruments to deal with current issues and gain ground.

The long intellectual and political coming-of-age process discussed by Jacques Delors contains real opportunities for common policies that could bolster and increase the presence of the EU in the world and hold off its loss of influence.

Without being completely thorough, we presented a couple of the areas where progress is necessary and achievable: the European Security Strategy, putting the current tools and instruments to better use, the role and action of the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission, a new neighbourhood policy, going deeper into the areas of trade and energy policies, and finally, a pragmatic approach to the Security and Defence Policy.

This significant undertaking will play its part in deciding for the renewal or decline of Europe, and thus it seems more important than ever for

the EU to be able to rely on the convergence of the positions of Member States.

The Member States will indeed play a determining role, just as much as their respective populations will do so through their choice of leaders. Consequently, the next elections of the European Parliament will be crucially important in determining if the assembly will be in favour of more Union or not. The ambitions that the European Institutions will set for themselves in terms of integration for the next couple of years will depend on the outcome of this election.

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This Policy Brief is part of the publication series “The Citizen and the European Elections”. The project intends to bring the debate on the European elections closer to the citizens, by focusing on those EU issues that are of particular importance to them.