

EU Global Strategy: Empty Wishes, No Real Plan



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The European Values Think-Tank is a non-governmental policy institute defending liberal democracy.

- The new EU strategy is too abstract and provides minimum specific guidelines. Challenges and threats are not classified and their definitions are often vague.
- The main downside of the document is its excessive idyllic nature and ambiguity. Document is missing further characterization and development of concepts such as strategic communication, durability, and integrated approaches to conflict or EU-NATO cooperation.
- Among its positive aspects is the explicit naming of Russian aggression in the Crimea including strategic communication as a tool of war against disinformation and fulfilment of international commitments vis-a-vis Sustainable Development Goals and/or development aid.
- Despite all expectations, the Global strategy is a product whose added value can be effectively doubted.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, fulfilled its commitment at the June European Council meeting introducing a new European Union foreign policy strategy- an estimated thirteen years after the Solana's European Security Strategy. The process of forming the new Global Strategy (EGS) began exactly a year ago when Mogherini undertook the task of creating a document that would facilitate the coordination of EU foreign policy, while firmly anchoring its role in today's "interconnected, complex and more competitive world." The High Representative, in cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), continuously consulted her vision with the EU institutions, national governments and national parliaments. The negotiations resulted in a declarative document whose value for executing foreign and security policy can be successfully doubted.

In the preface, Mogherini says that it is necessary to overcome the illusion of the zero-sum game within international politics. High Representative on the contrary believes that a union constituting almost half a billion has unique potential whose appropriate investment can result in a solution that is a win-win for all. It is questionable whether this idealistic approach to foreign and security policy would succeed in convincing and confronting with other relevant actors for whom the zero sum game is a decisive prism of international politics. The answer can be found in today's reality. It would not succeed. Today, Europe's surroundings are full of actors who often base their conduct on the zero-sum game whether it is the Russian Federation, Turkey, or so-called terrorist groups such as The Islamic State. Within this strategic international context the commitment and goals of the High Representative seem rather naive. Preface ends by emphasizing that the world needs a confident and responsible Union and EGS is a key document which will help to meet the needs, hopes and aspirations of EU citizens. The document however hardly fulfils these aspirations.

The strategy begins in a similar vein: "We need a strong European Union like never before. It is what our citizens deserve and what the wider world expects." According to the EGS, Union is currently in existential crisis and its values are under threat from the east and from the south. Gradually it sets out

the shared interests and principles, priorities and ultimately encourages the negotiations in which the European Union should be present on the world stage to succeed.

The key concerns of the EU, according to EGS, are peace and security (internal and external), prosperity (strong internal market and open international economic system), democracy (rule of law, fundamental freedoms, human rights) and the global order in which the UN plays a central role and which is based on multilateral international treaties. Other important principles include unity, accountability, and establishing relationships (engagement) with partners and opponents.

The Strategy also names five key priorities: safety, durability (resilience), an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperation with regional groupings and global governance. Within the safety category falls cooperation with NATO, when Mogherini on the one hand calls for closer collaboration and confirms the central role of NATO in the defence of Europe, and on the other hand, rightly points out that Europe must be able to take care of itself and should not rely on NATO during a crisis. However this formulation is a certain progress in thinking about European security, it is still very far from the core of discussions on a common European army and does not offer any further details on how exactly it should cooperate with NATO.

Therefore it remains an unsubstantial declaration, without a hint of a realistic roadmap. This portion the EGS furthermore covers measures against terrorism (information sharing, cooperation secret services), cyber security, energy security and strategic communications. The last point definitely deserves more than a single sentence about rebuttal of misinformation and promotion of the media environment. This superficial development is not adequate to the threat that the disinformation war represents for the European Union and the stability of its member states. Under the EEAS exists a modest nine-team East STRATCOM Task Force, whose main task is to confront the pro-Kremlin disinformation campaign. If the words of the High Representative's strategy to combat the disinformation offensives should be taken seriously, she should finally start to talk openly and vigorously to highlight the unacceptable activities of the Kremlin's representative. Also, the EEAS should multiply its capacity to respond to such threat. Today we can say that the EEAS only tolerates combat disinformation operations but, besides experts delivered and paid by the Member States, overall does almost nothing.

Resistance is defined by drafters of the EGS as the ability of state and society to reform and overcome internal and external crises. The European Union intends to strengthen the resilience of states, primarily in the area of enlargement policy (countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey), the European Neighbourhood Policy (Eastern Partnership and Mediterranean states) and other territories in Central Asia, the Middle East, central and southern Africa. However, the strategy systematically eliminates elaboration on how this resistance should be built or how EU institutions and Member States should support it.

An integrated approach to conflicts and crises lies in a multistage approach (presence in all parts of the conflict cycle: prevention, stabilization, settlement), a multilevel approach (local, regional, national) and a multilateral approach which is dependent on cooperation with other international partners. Listed

abstract concepts do not provide guidance for specific situations. The EU's current inability to interfere in any way within conflicts in its neighbourhood (for example North Africa, or present-day Syria) shows that more than tuneful declarations need realistic plans and politically enforced procedures which cannot be found in the EDS.

In support of regional stability, the European security plan is primarily mentioned, this plan was disrupted, for example, by acts of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, which is explicitly pointed out (EU does not recognize the annexation of the Crimea and does not accept the destabilization of Ukraine). EGS' perceived relationship with the Russian Federation is a key, but does not exclude cooperation in areas of shared interest. Other important players in the field of European security are the EU Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). In the Mediterranean region, the substantial multilateral cooperation is with countries of North Africa and the Middle East and bilateral cooperation with Turkey. Other partners are Gulf states (Gulf Cooperation Council - GCC) and various African Communities (African Union, the Economic Community of West African States - ECOWAS, etc.).

In the Americas, the key partner of the EU is the United States, particularly through NATO, but also because of the forthcoming bilateral trade agreement called transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP). Other important partners are Canada, the Community of Latin America, the Caribbean States (CELAC) and Mercosur. In Asia, naturally the most important actor is China, but the EU has only successfully communicated with the Republic of Korea, Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In the area of global governance, the EU is ready to reform the UN Security Council and international financial institutions. The reason is the credibility and legitimacy of these institutions, which should reflect the real balance of power in the world. Other objectives include development cooperation, enhancement of trade relations within the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), expansion of international standards relating to disarmament and the promotion and fulfilment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

A brief evaluation:

Unanswered questions and negative aspects predominate in the Global Strategy for the European Union over positive aspects. Among the pros of the document belong characteristically idealistic definitions of values and principles that are also characteristics of the Union from the outset. They set a clear benchmark and give answers to the question of what European values are. Another positive point is the inclusion of strategic communication which was promoted by the European Values Think-Tank at the level of the National Convention on the EU. The disinformation war is mainly for eastern EU member states due to the geographical proximity and its importance to be dealt with at the EU level. But it is just a short declaration, which is often contrary with the current actions of the High Representative. The question is how it will be implemented. The essential point of EGS is also an explicit rejection of the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the destabilization of Ukraine. EU's relationship with Russia is crucial particularly due to energy dependence and the need to work out this issue. The EU's commitment towards meeting the climate agreements and further support development cooperation belongs amongst the positive and concrete expression of the document.

The main weakness of the strategy, however, lies in its ambiguity. First, there is a lack of any hierarchy other than geographical categorization of challenges that the Union should confront. Allies, partners and opponents are scattered throughout the document, and for some players it is not clear whether they are closer or further away to the EU territory. Secondly, if the challenges or threats are defined, their solution is outlined only vaguely and without framework instruments or schedules. As already mentioned, in the case of European security, its relationship with NATO is pointed out and the EUS's reliance while other information is lacking - it is not clear how the EU and NATO should cooperate and how the framework of cooperation should look like. Furthermore, the strategy deals with the concept of resilience of states and societies, as well as the concept of an integrated approach to conflict. Both terms are described in very general way, which hardly offers something new or of relevance. Thirdly, the EGS avoids some of the issues in which it is necessary to establish a clear direction. These include, for example, the role of the EEAS, which has remained unspecified since its founding in 2010.

Global Strategy contrary to expectations, unfortunately, does not offer anything new. The document, to some extent, resembles the standard textbook or summary of general wishes rather than specific strategies and their concrete implementation. The document is missing a timeframe, therefore it may be hidden for ten years in a drawer and nothing could happen. More than thirty pages of the document look very idealistic and abstract. There are not many concrete and specific items to be found. From this view, the document sounds timeless, but this is not a positive aspect, but rather an indicator of how limited concrete answers and clues are offered and how difficult it is for all Member States to agree on anything specific. For almost every conceivable foreign policy step can be found a supportive argument. Direction foreign policy can be a truly difficult task based on this document.

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The European Values Think-Tank is a non-governmental policy institute defending liberal democracy.

Our vision is that of a free, safe and prosperous Czech Republic within Central Europe that is an integral part of the West.

We help to face aggressive regimes, radicalisation within the society, the spread of authoritarian tendencies and extremist ideologies including Islamism.

We provide decision-makers with expert recommendations and we systematically watch and evaluate their performance. We consider active citizens, accountable politicians, political parties that fulfil their role, as well as cohesive society that shares the values of individual freedom, human dignity and equal rights to be the principle elements of a functioning liberal democracy.

Since 2005, as a non-governmental and a non-profitable organisation which is not linked to any political party, we have pursued research and educational activities. In addition to publishing analytical papers and commentaries for the media, we organise conferences, seminars and training sessions for both experts and the wider public. Our events provide a platform for dialogue amongst politicians, experts, journalists, businesspeople and students.

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