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COMMENT

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The EU global strategy on foreign and security policy > Political direction by member states is needed in shaping Europe's foreign policy goals

In June 2015 the European Council issued a mandate for a new EU foreign policy strategy. The importance of identifying the aims and means for the EU should not be underestimated. The success of the strategy depends on the member states' willingness to make political choices that will make the effort worthwhile.

The EU's heads of state and government have tasked EU High Representative Federica Mogherini with preparing an 'EU global strategy on foreign and security policy' to be presented at a meeting in summer 2016. Mogherini's task could be a step in upgrading the EU as a global actor and might define the legacy of her term as EU foreign policy chief. However, the process is liable to fail if it does not manage to get the member states on board.

Europe's transformed security environment is the starting point for the new strategy. The old 2003 European Security Strategy was the EU's counter-offer to the US Security Strategy and was drafted following the member states' division over the Iraq war. It started from the notion of Europe's 'soft power', based on a peaceful and integrated continent that is able to spread its rule-based model of cooperation around the world.

The old strategy has not passed the reality check of recent years, whereby Russia has challenged Europe's security order and the EU has become encircled by crises. A small-scale report on the security strategy in 2008 only partly addressed changes in the security environment. In the meantime, increased globalization, spreading

economic, religious and ideological tensions and the rise of new global and regional players have made the world 'more connected, more contested and more complex', as an assessment by Mogherini for the June European Council concluded. While member states and EU institutions had been reluctant to write a new strategy – fearing to expose divisions rather than find common ground – they saw that the time was ripe for investing in a compass to guide their common action. But will they deliver?

It is not yet clear whether the member states will throw their weight behind the strategy. The exercise will be worth little without their input and commitment. They have to adopt positions on new threats, such as state failure in Syria and Libya with the resulting refugee crisis, as well as a more demanding relationship with Russia. If the global environment is less marked by cooperation and win-win constellations, the strategy needs to define a clear – and possibly for some confrontational – direction. This will ultimately require political decisions by the member states, which some might seek to avoid.

In contrast to the old security strategy, the global strategy will be holistic in nature and comprise non-

security instruments that the EU has at its disposal, such as development cooperation and energy, climate or trade policies. This is an important step. It will indicate that these instruments have to be made to work together in a joined-up approach to function effectively. It is also likely that the strategy will focus on a number of regions of key importance. But prioritization will be difficult: Mogherini's assessment report omits few places, highlighting the immediate neighbourhood, the Middle East and North Africa region, Africa, the transatlantic partnership and Asia.

One of the main aims of the strategy review will be to engage the member states in a debate on foreign and security policy that helps them to become aware of their common interests. In April, Mogherini underlined that member state interests had always been the driver behind the European integration project: "The EU started as an economic project based on common interests. Now we need to develop also common interests for foreign policy and an idea how we engage with the world around us."

On the one hand, the writing process has to be steered to the extent that it does not lose the focus of producing a targeted and forward-looking vision of what the EU wants

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to achieve with the member states. The writing of the document will be controlled by a non-bureaucratic team composed of several experts that will ensure that the document is user-friendly and does not shy away from making explicit statements.

On the other hand, the process has to be inclusive enough to serve the purpose of starting a debate on what the member states want to achieve with the EU. The debate is as important as the end-product in order to finally achieve a sense of ownership of EU foreign policy in the capitals. Towards that end, national think tanks and foreign ministries are already planning seminars for experts and the wider public. The recent German foreign policy review, which used an internet platform for an exchange of citizens' and experts' opinions, will also serve as an example.

The formulation of the new EU global strategy on foreign and security policy should be seen in conjunction with – but not confused with – other review exercises taking place at the moment. The reviews of the European Neighbourhood Policy and of EU defence cooperation naturally interlink with, and should feed into, the holistic strategic process. However, these reviews are on concrete policies, triggering

concrete outcomes, while the global strategy seeks to formulate the overall purpose and how the individual policies can serve it.

The officials running the EU foreign policy machinery in Brussels are in need of a strategy as well. While the changes brought about by the 2009 Lisbon Treaty improved the institutional framework of coordination, they did not fill the vacuum of a missing EU foreign policy identity. The new European External Action Service has thus far been unable to provide a sense of direction but, conversely, would benefit from being advised on the aims and limits of the EU's common foreign and security policy.

The EU has a comprehensive toolkit, ranging from diplomacy and crisis intervention capabilities to economic cooperation and sanctioning instruments. When applied together, these can have a significant impact on the stability of the international system. What is needed now is the political will in the member states to formulate a strategy that makes best use of the EU's toolkit.