

04 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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The 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) drove the agenda of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) for about a year or two – then its impact fizzled out.

While it remains a core reference text to this day, it has little real impact on actual decision-making. If we want to avoid the same fate for the future EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS), we have to already start thinking about the impact we want it to have.

The main reason why diplomats and officials stopped referring to the ESS is that there was no bureaucratic necessity for them to do so. As the workload is huge and the number of people involved in this realm is relatively limited, the tendency is to focus on the urgent or the inescapable. The trick therefore is to make the EUGS inescapable, too.

A need for reform

First and foremost this requires an EUGS that is not just a catalogue of important issues but also a

real agenda for action. Of course, a Global Strategy must be truly global in scope, and catalogue what we deem important around the world. But that is only the necessary first step to arrive at the crucial second phase: prioritisation.

This means identifying the items from the catalogue for which the EU will launch an initiative. Objectives are to be clearly set, and met during High Representative Mogherini's current term. For each priority it is important to identify which existing instruments have to be strengthened or revised – or alternatively what new instruments need to be created and by when.

The EUGS can thus be interpreted as a mandate to the High Representative and, through her, to the apparatus of the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). This clear allocation of tasks, with deadlines to report back to the European Council or the Foreign Affairs Council, will render the EUGS bureaucratically inescapable.

Second, the member states must also be involved

in the implementation of these tasks. This will ensure that they, too, are motivated to use the EUGS as a guiding document. From the start, member states have been closely involved in the drafting of the EUGS through regular consultations at various levels. These have included meetings in Brussels, chaired by the EEAS, with contact points designated by individual foreign ministries.

Creating a permanent follow-up system that also monitors the implementation of the EUGS – as well as all subsequent EU documents’ compatibility with it – would add a structural element to member states’ involvement and enhance the impact of the strategy. To this end, the discussions involving contact points could be made permanent, or this could simply become an explicit mandate of the Political and Security Committee.

Third, effective implementation of the EUGS requires flexibility. However, as unanimity is required for nearly all decisions, the CFSP is handicapped by its intergovernmental nature. That said, the Lisbon Treaty already contains a way of rendering decision-making more flexible: the European Council can adopt ‘decisions defining the strategic interests and objectives’ of the EU, which the Foreign Affairs Council can subsequently implement by qualified majority vote (QMV).

Only three such ‘common strategies’ (as they were previously called) have ever been adopted, the last one in 2000. The instrument could be reactivated by translating each of the main priorities of the EUGS into a ‘common strategy’.

A change in decision-making

By making full use of existing treaty provisions, a cultural change could thus be brought

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about in CFSP decision-making. With regard to the priorities identified by the EUGS, the High Representative, supported by like-minded member states, could systematically resort to QMV and gradually introduce a much more flexible decision-making practice.

Finally, to keep the EUGS relevant it must be limited in time. No agenda for action can remain relevant for more than one term of office. It is therefore best to stipulate in the EUGS itself that it will be revised no later than five years after its adoption. The same process of strategising which is now underway should be initiated by the High Representative every time he/she is elected.

If we can learn from the missed opportunities of the past, there is no reason to not get the process right this time.

