

12 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

Petro Burkovskyi

Deputy Chief of the Analytical and Information Division

National Institute for Strategic Studies, Kiev

In the last eight years the European Union has endured a series of unprecedented crises. These have included the global ‘credit crunch’ of 2008-9 that threatened to break up the eurozone, the spillover of Islamist violence and extremism in the wake of the ‘Arab Spring’ and ensuing civil wars in Libya and Syria, and the ‘hybrid warfare’ tactics used by Russia to reassert its influence in the EU’s neighbourhood. Then, in 2015, when hundreds of thousands of migrants fleeing conflict and hardship in the Middle East and Africa arrived in Europe, the EU found itself confronted with the biggest refugee crisis since the Second World War.

Moreover, the EU is struggling with the backlash against its badly-timed and equally badly-designed countermeasures. We are currently witnessing growing popular discontent with Brussels, which is increasingly seen as elitist and out of touch with its citizens’ concerns. Public anxiety about the deteriorating security and geopolitical environment only serves to increase the gap between the EU institutions and citizens, thereby undermining the sense of mutual solidarity and interdependence that is one of the cornerstones of the EU.

As a result, a rising wave of political populism embraced by both left- and right-wing eurosceptic parties threatens to hijack the working agenda of the European Parliament and the European Council in the next few years. If that happens there will be no place for an EU global strategy. It would be wholly subordinated to the loose and vague consensus of interests prevailing among the members of the new ‘Concert of Europe’ and their separate relationships with the biggest external powers.

A new crisis response mechanism

In an attempt to reduce the probability of this scenario occurring and to bolster the EU’s security architecture, policymakers must adopt a new, flexible and dynamic approach to security based on the model of a ‘pulsating organisation’ – a set of rules and procedures enabling rapid and effective crisis response.

First, however, some points need to be made about how a new security mechanism should *not* be designed. It is not possible, nor indeed would it be useful, to build another bureaucratic security and defence alliance similar to NATO that would only end

up being overshadowed by the Atlantic alliance's capabilities and command structures. Nor is it prudent to outsource European security tasks to organisations like the OSCE. The latter has already proved inefficient in monitoring and mediating a fragile armistice in eastern Ukraine. Finally, it is not realistic to imagine that a European army, intelligence service or cyber security task force can be built without a single chain of command above the national governments, just as we cannot imagine European Monetary Union without the EU Commission and European Central Bank. In the same way that competing national economic interests and goals within Europe had to be reconciled in the 1950s and 60s, the national security concerns of the member states must be taken into account and national governments assigned an active role in formulating common European security and defence policies.

Security imperatives

In the past year the EU has found itself struggling to cope with a migration crisis of unprecedented proportions. As this crisis has unfolded it has become clear which countries can be identified respectively as 'target destination countries', 'transit countries' and 'sources' of the migrant flows. The tactical political response from the target destination countries has been to buy time to shield themselves from the massive influx of refugees, while transit countries and source countries have decided to avail of the EU freedom of movement regime to transfer the burden of migrants onto others.

To implement an effective EU response to this crisis, the target countries should prepare temporary camps to accommodate migrants, and both target destination countries and transit countries should set up registration 'hotspots' to filter out potential terrorists and radicals, as well as provide relief facilities to care for the aged, young, sick and starving. Finally, in

collaboration with the migrants' countries of origin, concerned member states may take humanitarian or military action to address the causes of the crisis.

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All phases of such a crisis response effort must be fully supported by the EU funds and budget, which would work as an insurance policy for the member states confronted with critical

situations. To be eligible for financial aid as participants in the new mechanism, governments would be required to conduct annual defence and security policy reviews in consultation with bordering member states or friendly external nations, which would in turn improve the performance of their military and security agencies. Nations would, in collaboration with their immediate neighbours, be required to plan at least two training exercises, beyond NATO obligations, to tackle the most urgent common threats or pre-identified security risks and participate once every two years in an all-European simulated crisis response operation. If the country meets these requirements it is guaranteed to receive financial aid automatically in the event of an emergency arising.

That means that in the next 50 years EU funds must be redirected to the nations that cooperate in resolving security issues or reacting to crises. It would be in the national interest of every member state to participate in relevant exercises and use the earmarked funds judiciously, so that in a really dangerous situation they can rely on an efficient EU crisis response mechanism.

This approach would also mean that, instead of involving all member states in crisis decision making, the European Council would delegate powers to the directly affected members and their partners, with support from the EU Commission, and scrutiny of the EU Parliament and the European Court of Justice.

