

50 EU GLOBAL STRATEGY EXPERT OPINION

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There is a danger in making the strategic review too complex. There is merit in recalling the parsimonious interpretation of the world that has inspired realists: system anarchy; the fundamental role of states; the centrality of the distribution of power; balance of power. Indeed, *power* itself.

These basics remain the crucial elements of international relations. The currencies the EU prefers – multilateralism, international law, international institutions, diplomacy, soft and smart power – have all come into their own since 1945 and they have a vital role to play. But there should be no illusions: positive sum aspirations have not replaced zero-sum realities.

A regional focus

Draft EU Global Strategy (EUGS) papers speak of ‘taking the lead in stabilising Europe’s broad neighbourhood, including the neighbours of the neighbours’. What does that mean in practice? We need a clear answer to the following key question: not so much what should the EU *aim to do*, but what is it that the EU *can realistically*

hope to achieve in the neighbourhood – including the neighbours of the neighbours. The geographic focus is important. The EU is a global trading actor and a key partner of the UN; but in terms of the deployment of crisis management power, it should not for the foreseeable future aspire to be anything other than *a regional power*.

What might the EU hope to achieve in the neighbourhood? Lucidity about the EU’s real leverage is essential. If EU accession is not on the cards, leverage is massively reduced. The most the EU can hope to do in the southern neighbourhood is to *assist local and regional political initiatives* aimed at stabilisation. An earlier paper from the High Representative correctly spoke of ‘rethinking the EU’s transformative agenda’. That is a crucial objective. The EU needs to focus much more on interests. In the context of a rapidly changing globalised system marked by power transition, the interests of the member states are massively convergent rather than divergent. The EU needs to recognise that, to quantify it, to act on it.

To the east, the ‘neighbours of the neighbours’

means Russia. Tony Blair once said that we have to have enlargement because we cannot have instability on our borders. That statement is illogical. The further the EU enlarges, the greater the instability on its borders. Any strategy for the east has to start (not finish) with Russia. The EU has a Russia problem, not just a Putin problem. For 300 years. Russia has been an essential actor in the European system – one which can neither be integrated nor (equally importantly) ignored.

The EU's Russia policy should involve, first and foremost, a lucid assessment of the cards the EU holds. The EU has been playing identity politics in Ukraine, while Putin has been playing Thucydides. Europe possesses many resources – technological, financial, commercial, scientific, demographic and political that vastly outweigh those of Russia. These should be deployed more strategically – which means more collectively.

In the immediate future, the EU must solve the Ukraine problem. The Union needs to be clear on two things. First, is Ukrainian membership in the EU's interest? If not, it should be explicitly ruled out and a mutually acceptable arrangement negotiated between Brussels, Kiev and Moscow.

If Ukrainian accession is deemed to be in the EU's interest, the second question becomes: at what price? To answer that question, the EU needs need a strategy towards Russia that says very clearly: a) how its interests mesh with those of Russia – and they are many; and b) how far Brussels is prepared to go to confront Moscow over the issues on which they disagree.

A functional defence

To achieve this, the EUGS must ensure the EU's strategic autonomy. Almost 20 years after Saint

Malo, the EU is more dependent on the US for its security than it was in the mid-1990s. As the CSDP story has unfolded, and as the US has tilted to Asia, the cries from Washington D.C. for Europeans to step up and assume leadership in their neighbourhood have become deafening.

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Currently, the EU has the worst of all worlds. It has neither enlargement nor stability on the borders. It has a dysfunctional NATO that, despite

the strong words of a succession of secretaries-general, is so riddled with internal contradictions as to be in a state of existential crisis – precisely when a credible deterrent is more necessary than ever. And it has a CSDP that has morphed into something very different from what was anticipated during its gestation – which was precisely an autonomous military and civilian capacity that would allow the EU to ‘play its full role on the international stage’, including by being prepared to conduct high-end warfare.

It has become a truism to call for greater ‘cooperation’ between the EU and NATO. But cooperation is not enough. We need (and the Americans want) that entity to be increasingly led by Europeans and genuinely competent. Europeans must finally emerge as the architects and guarantors of their own regional security. Europe should progressively merge CSDP into NATO and take over primary responsibilities, both political and military, within a transformed alliance.

