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INSTITUTE REPORT

THE EU AND GLOBAL GOVERNANCE: RULES, POWER AND PRIORITIES

An EUISS seminar in cooperation with the Istituto Affari Internazionali

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The EU Institute for Security Studies has launched a series of three seminars on 'European Interests and Strategic Options' which will culminate in a policy forum in Paris on 2 and 3 October 2008. Following the decision of the European Council in December 2007 to review the implementation of the European Security Strategy (ESS) with a view to proposing elements to improve the implementation and, where appropriate, to complement it, this initiative aims to enhance the strategic debate on the performance and objectives of the Union as an international actor.

The first seminar in this series – 'The EU and global governance: rules, power and priorities' – was held in Rome on 5 and 6 June 2008 in cooperation with the Istituto Affari Internazionali and addressed the Union's strategic objective to develop 'an international order based on effective multilateralism'. Around 80 practitioners and experts took part in plenary debates and actively participated in three workshops dealing with the implementation of the ESS in key foreign policy domains, namely security and development, non-proliferation and disarmament, and human rights. What follows is a synthesis of the main strands of the debate in the two plenary sessions and of the discussions that took place in the three parallel workshops.

Main points

- Strategic thinking needs to be framed in European terms, with a view to identifying common interests and implementing them effectively. The ESS guidelines remain valid but the convergence of Member States around key objectives should be enhanced and priorities should be more clearly indicated.
- Political cohesion, solidarity, consensus and continuity are the essential building blocks for the external projection of the Union. The implementation of the Lisbon Treaty is important to enable the Union to devise a strategic approach and above all to apply it consistently.*
- The EU needs to improve policy coordination and consistency, including between its internal and external policies. Bridging the gap between sectoral policies and organisations should also be a priority for the Union in shaping the multilateral system at large, as challenges are growing more complex and interconnected.
- In a more competitive international environment, the EU has to pursue a ‘multi-level’ foreign policy that includes both defending its interests and promoting its values. This is going to be a difficult but essential balancing act. The EU needs to become better at establishing strategic partnerships with other global actors. On the other hand, the EU cannot and should not neglect those aspects that make it a distinctive international actor, namely the pursuit of effective multilateral solutions and the promotion of human rights, good governance and democracy.

The European Security Strategy: a critical review

The nature of the strategic debate launched in December 2007 was the subject of broad agreement, although there were different nuances of opinion regarding the scope and ultimate purpose of the exercise. It was stressed that the parameters of the review of the implementation of the ESS had been set by the European Council and that the reach and ambition of the ongoing process needed to be framed in that context. Some participants argued that the door should be left open for further developments and additions in the light of the momentous changes in the international system (see below). Many felt that not only the implementation of the ESS document but also the analysis of the global transformations affecting its background, and of the consequent challenges, needed careful consideration. No conclusion was drawn as to whether that would impact on the text of the ESS as such.

With regard to the important events taking place in the course of 2008 and 2009, many noted the timeliness of this process. The upcoming US presidential elections, the recent change of leadership in Moscow, and the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty provide a window of opportunity for the EU to contribute new ideas and influence developments. The strategic debate at EU level can also have an impact on the process leading to the formulation of a new NATO strategic concept.

* The discussion took place before the Irish referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.

It was pointed out that there is a pressing need for strategic thinking, that such thinking should be framed in European terms, with a view to identifying common interests, and that much focus should be put on the implementation of strategic guidelines. With a view to implementation, the basic requirements of priority-setting and coherence were emphasised. First, the EU cannot realistically aim to intervene everywhere at all times and some ranking of priorities was essential to channel resources and determine the degree of the EU's involvement. Second, coherence should be fostered not only between different policies, but also between what the EU does and the principles and values that it claims to represent and support at the global level.

Many insisted that the EU needed to be given the appropriate instruments and procedures to implement its strategic objectives. A number of participants stressed that the full implementation of the new provisions of the Lisbon Treaty concerning CFSP and external action at large would be crucial to enable the EU to shape and implement an effective security strategy.

The shifting geopolitical context: challenges ahead

It was noted that the biggest systemic change compared to 2003 consisted of the shift of economic and political power from the West to emerging countries. A new international order is being defined and the EU needs to contribute to this evolution with new ideas and policy innovation. Some described the international system shaping up as 'multipolar' and maintained that the biggest challenge for the EU would be to manage emerging multipolarity through multilateral structures and initiatives. In this context, it was stressed that the EU needs to get better at shaping strategic partnerships with major global players. The list of threats and challenges included in the ESS was considered still relevant but it was argued that the shift in the underlying geopolitical paradigm needed to be better reflected.

In particular, it was argued that the liberal internationalist vision underpinning the EU's strategic posture was seriously challenged by the mutual interplay of economic globalisation and geopolitical considerations. Globalisation shapes geopolitics in three main ways, namely via the rapid growth of new economic powers, the competition for energy and raw materials, and the huge transfer of financial resources from the West to new economic centres. Conversely, geopolitics is transforming globalisation, as political considerations inform economic and energy strategies. Politics and economics are increasingly intertwined and require a joint strategic approach.

The growing competition of ideas, narratives and political models challenged, according to some participants, the international legitimacy of the EU and of the West at large, thereby affecting the pursuit of its priorities. In addition to the distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes, many emphasised that between countries prepared to share sovereignty to enter multilateral arrangements and those holding an absolute notion of sovereignty, and thus not inclined to subscribe to international rules. In this respect, the big question was what would be the prevailing trend. The answer would have considerable implications for the EU, which is based on the very principle of sharing sovereignty.

The EU: redefining its role(s) as an international actor

Three main sets of issues were addressed in this context. First, given the changing strategic landscape, some argued that the EU needed to equip itself to play simultaneously at different levels, namely interest-based bargaining and multilateral cooperation. One speaker described the challenge for the EU as ‘being more like the others’ but the question was raised as to whether the EU is both willing and able to do that and play power politics. Another participant felt that the EU should not frame relationships in confrontational terms, as that would not be consistent with the very nature of the European project. Playing different roles with different partners and on different policy issues would also carry implications for the way in which the EU is perceived by others.

Second, with a reference to the much-discussed EU’s ‘transformational’ power, the point was made that EU’s power ‘begins at home’ – soft power is a function of the political and strategic culture of the EU and of the attractiveness of its model. The EU can influence transformation and reform in other countries either directly, through enlargement, or by default. The latter form of influence would crucially depend on the internal features of the Union, and on its political cohesion. It was stressed in this context that cohesion and solidarity are precious goods for the external projection of the EU, and that Member States should strive to shape a common front *vis-à-vis* third countries.

Third, and related to this, many felt that the EU needed to organise itself more effectively if it wanted to help shape the international order at large. From this standpoint, the problem of the disconnection between EU policies was highlighted, with an emphasis on the link between internal and external policies such as migration and integration, neighbourhood, state capacity-building, as well as border controls. At the national level, the priorities and perceptions of different ministries on EU-relevant policy matters were considered still difficult to reconcile in a coherent vision. At the European level, coherence needed to be enhanced between different ‘pillars’ and within each institution in terms of both policy measures and effective use of financial resources. Participants agreed that devising and implementing the European Security Strategy crucially required cohesion, consensus-building, coherence and continuity.

Multilateralism under pressure

The assessment of the effectiveness of multilateral frameworks and initiatives was mixed. It was emphasised that the focus should shift from the concept of effective multilateralism to the concrete measures needed to make multilateralism work in specific organisations and on priority issues. From an EU standpoint, effective multilateralism is about delivering solutions in a cooperative fashion. However, some speakers noted that this distinctive European approach was not necessarily shared by other major global players, who regarded multilateralism as a means to balance US power. The challenge lies in engaging global players at the level of both discourse and practice to consolidate the multilateral order. In this respect, however, it was remarked that the EU preached effective multilateralism but its Member States were not prepared to devise a common approach to the reform of international organisations, thereby undermining their own policy.

According to various speakers, the effectiveness and legitimacy of multilateral organisations were affected not only by shifting power structures but by internal shortcomings as well. Reference was made in particular to a deficit of accountability, which made it difficult to allocate responsibility, a deficit of human and financial resources in the face of an expanding policy agenda, and a deficit of confidentiality, with leaks hampering frank exchanges on sensitive matters. Multilateral institutions also suffered from introspection, with achieving a common position often considered as tantamount to accomplishing a policy, and from the constraints of the minimum common denominator compromise.

It was also noted that ‘disaggregating’ problems between different international organisations with different competences and cultures challenged the quest for comprehensive responses to complex and interconnected challenges. One speaker argued that, ultimately, the nation state remained the most effective actor in international politics but it was broadly agreed that this was not a sustainable solution and that the shortcomings of multilateral cooperation should provide the trigger for re-launching multilateral engagement and not for rolling it back.

Turning to specific international organisations, the centrality of the UN to international peace and security was restated by many. Disappointment with the new Human Rights Council was balanced by new hopes with regard to the activities of the Peacebuilding Commission. The success of the WTO in integrating China into a framework of common binding rules was highlighted, as well as the progress made in the preparation of the upcoming talks on climate change, with a strong EU leadership role. On the other hand, it was felt that non-proliferation and disarmament regimes had been seriously strained and were weaker now than in 2003, which called for stronger investment in their consolidation.

Workshop One: security and development

Assessment

The ESS acknowledged that security and development go hand in hand in building peace and stability. As such, participants felt that the document was still relevant, although much remained to be done for the EU to implement a comprehensive approach to crisis management, prevention and stabilisation. Some progress has been achieved with more joint assessment and fact-finding missions and with the focus on security sector reform (SSR) and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) – bridge-building policy areas at the junction of security and development. Likewise, various speakers noted the joined-up effort of the EU in establishing a joint strategy with the African Union (AU) and the setting up of a double-hatted position heading the EU representation to the AU. In this connection, it was argued that the establishment of the External Action Service would enhance coherence from planning to implementation.

However, various challenges were highlighted which still hampered progress in this direction. First, it was remarked that ‘cultural differences’ and reluctance to engage

between the security and development communities still prevented effective cooperation. Second, it was stressed that training was a problem for both security and development practitioners, since both groups needed to be made more sensitive to respective requirements. Third, the EU needed to clarify whose security it wanted to guarantee primarily, whether that of the state, of individuals or of communities, as different policy recipes would follow. Fourth, and related, the concept of ownership needed to be ‘unpacked’ in implementing the security-development nexus, as EU perspectives may not fit with those of local actors. Fifth, ‘context-sensitivity’ was considered essential to devise the best approaches in a flexible way, and the rigidity of traditional EU assistance programmes was questioned. Sixth, various speakers noted that more work was required to reconcile the security and development agendas not only in Africa but also in other regions, such as Kosovo, the frozen conflicts in the Eastern neighbourhood, and in the Palestinian territories.

Many participants argued that coherence needed to be promoted not only between different policy areas but between different actors on the ground as well. It was recalled that EU Member States often took a leading role, for example in Africa, but coordination between the national level and the EU level left scope for improvement. Little coordination within the EU also undermined coordination with other international organisations, chiefly the UN. All agreed that the EU and the UN would gain very much from enhancing cooperation but their different structures and procedures made that difficult.

Policy implications and recommendations

- The EU needs to generate more civilian capabilities for conflict prevention, management and post-conflict stabilisation, and include a wide range of expertise in future formats. Training should be a priority and the interaction between the security and development communities should start at this level.
- Various Member States have accumulated relevant experience and developed distinctive approaches, which should be addressed with a view to generating convergence at EU level. The activities of Member States in the field should be much more closely connected with those of the EU.
- Lines of command and responsibility should be further clarified and consolidated at EU level to maximise coordination. There is a question of overall authority in the field and the UN model of integrated missions, with the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) in charge of coordination, could offer interesting insights.
- The EU and the UN should work more closely together on identifying and learning lessons from operational experience, as a basis for further cooperation. Better synergies should also be sought with NATO where the three organisations operate in the field.
- The EU should devise clear strategic priorities guiding its intervention in conflicts or crises. Policy coordination cannot substitute for a clear sense of the political purposes of the mission and of its ultimate objectives. At a broader level, the scope for EU participation in international interventions was explored and the question was put as to whether the EU needed to identify its own niches or to implement a more ambitious approach cutting across all the dimensions of such interventions.

Workshop Two: Non-proliferation and disarmament

Assessment

The ESS singles out WMD proliferation as ‘potentially the greatest threat’ to European security. The EU common interests and strategic options have largely been identified in the domain of non-proliferation. There is a consensus on the fact that, since the spread of WMD is a global problem, it can only be dealt with through multilateral regimes and action, and the EU/Member States are the main supporters and funders of these arrangements. That said, there is reason for concern when looking at the progressive weakening of multilateral regimes and notably at the challenge posed by the Iranian nuclear programme. While the EU has taken a proactive role on the Iranian dossier, it has been absent from other key issues such as North Korea or the implications of the US-India nuclear deal.

There was a broad agreement on the fact that the ESS sections on non-proliferation did not require amendment, although some felt that the mention of the possible terrorist use of WMD needed clarification. The EU’s WMD strategy also proved a viable document and a good framework for action. Speakers underlined that more focus needed to be put on implementation. Moreover, the upcoming change of administration in the US provided an opportunity for the EU to make a strong case for a deeper American engagement in non-proliferation regimes, such as the ratification and implementation of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

Policy implications and recommendations

- The EU should enhance its commitment to engage third countries in joining and implementing non-proliferation regimes, as it helped to do with respect to the Chemical Weapons Convention.
- The EU should take a stronger profile in the arms control debate and target specific issues where Member States’ positions converge, such as on averting the spread of ballistic missiles.
- Given the limited resources available, the EU should keep a clear sense of its priorities. At the same time, the resources dedicated to this important dossier should be expanded.
- Coordination should be enhanced across all the policy domains which impact on non-proliferation, such as energy policy and also cooperation agreements and security sector reform.

Workshop Three: human rights

Assessment

Some participants felt that the EU needed to improve its performance in promoting human rights in third countries. It was argued that the tools and procedures to implement human rights policies have not much improved since 2003 and some felt that funding was not commensurate to policy ambitions. More broadly, many

speakers pointed at the growing tension among EU foreign policy priorities between the normative agenda of human rights and democracy promotion and economic or energy concerns.

The point was made that positive conditionality was not consistently applied and led to a perception of double standards. It was also emphasised that the share of assistance going through the governments of third countries was growing, while more focus needed to be put on how to involve civil society actors. The practice of negative conditionality by way of sanctions was not regarded as an effective means of promoting democracy and human rights.

Participants noted that the expansion of democracy and freedom around the world is stalling, although some felt that the picture is not black and white as there are both 'illiberal' democracies and relatively 'liberal' authoritarian regimes. The rise of powers not subscribing to the human rights agenda made things more complicated for the EU in regions such as Central Asia and Africa. Some felt that the EU needed to engage regional organisations and democratic actors such as India, South Africa and Brazil in the promotion of human rights. It was argued, however, that the democratic nature of domestic political regimes did not entail that democracy promotion would be a foreign policy priority for these countries.

The respect of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of crisis management operations was addressed and EU practice in this regard was positively assessed. Legal shortcomings were identified concerning the protection of human rights in the course of ESDP operations, notably regarding the access to remedy and compensation in case of their violation, but it was noted that the EU and its Member States sought to abide by the highest standards. Counter-terrorist policies also needed to fully respect human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Policy implications and recommendations

- The values upheld by the EU constitute the real 'added value' of its foreign policy compared to other actors. Much thought needs to go into defining the balance between the legitimate pursuit of European interests and the enhanced promotion of human rights and democracy.
- The promotion of human rights and democracy should be better mainstreamed across other external policies. The EU needs a sort of 'Consensus on democracy' along the lines of the 'Consensus on development'.
- If it wants to make a difference, the EU should allocate more resources to these policy objectives, while policies and incentives should be better fine-tuned depending on the specific political circumstances of recipient countries. In this context, there was a need to avoid excessive dependence on local governments and further involve civil society in reform processes.
- Relevant EU policy documents should include a clear commitment to the respect of the highest standards of human rights and international humanitarian law in conflict and crisis management situations.