

Shared Vision, Common Action, Stronger Europe

Is the Implementation of the EU Global Strategy Meeting Expectations?

REPORT

On the 27-28 April 2017 the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU and the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) organised a high-level conference in Malta to debate the security and defence aspects of the EU Global Strategy. The conference brought together high-level policymakers and think-tankers to critically analyse the progress made on European security and defence. In particular, the organisers were keen to assist High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini in taking stock of the progress made on the EU Global Strategy follow-on work blocks, particularly in the area of security and defence. The conference was structured around three panel sessions and keynote speeches were delivered by European Commissioner for the Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, Elżbieta Bieńkowska, Malta's Minister for Home Affairs and National Security, Carmelo Abela, and the Chairman of the EU Military Committee, General Mikhail Kostarakos. Malta's Ambassador to the Political and Security Committee, Alan Bugeja, and EUISS Director, Antonio Missiroli, introduced and concluded the conference. This report summarises the main lines of thought and debate during the conference.

Session 1: The implementation of the EU Global Strategy

The first session focused on the general state of play of the implementation of the security and defence aspects of the EU Global Strategy. One of the driving questions of this session was to what extent the EU Global Strategy has, since its publication, driven the EU's and member states' foreign and security policies. One of the panellists asked whether the member states have truly taken ownership of the EU Global Strategy since last June. While it was acknowledged that several initiatives such as the European Defence Fund and the Military Planning and Capability Conduct (MPCC) display a renewed level of ambition, a question remains about the political willingness of member states to keep up the momentum on European defence cooperation beyond 2017. One of the panellists displayed a degree of impatience with a seemingly continuous period of process without concrete actions that will ensure Europe's strategic autonomy as a defence actor.

Countering this viewpoint, another panellist explained how the importance of process should not be overlooked. It is only through pushing forward with changes such as the MPCC, the defence fund and the coordinated annual review of defence (CARD) that the member states are re-investing in EU defence. This point was supported by the observation that the EU Global Strategy is changing the way certain countries view CSDP. In particular, the range of initiatives developed by the EU at the end of 2016 on security and defence has put CSDP back on the map. Many of the panellists recognised that 2017 would be a year of elections in Europe, so this would perhaps constrain the member states' ability to launch initiatives such as permanent structured cooperation (PeSCo). Nevertheless, one panellist argued that defence is the one area today that EU member states are committed to. There is an appetite for more integration on security and defence, which is not necessarily the case for other areas of EU policy.

There was broad agreement that many of the initiatives agreed to in the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence (IPSD) and European Defence Action Plan (EDAP) in 2016 would lead to more effective EU defence. However, one of the more contentious points during the session stemmed from a discussion about 'strategic solidarity'. It was argued that the EU Global Strategy has not done much to increase awareness and solidarity between member states regarding security in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Here it was put to the audience that the EU Global Strategy can be judged a success when eastern EU member states have a stake in security in southern Europe and vice-versa.



Turning to the concept of resilience, one of the other work strands of the EU Global Strategy, the audience learned how resilience in the external realm can have a direct effect on the EU's internal resilience. In this sense, resilience is not geographically confined to Europe's neighbourhood. The migration crisis is a pertinent example of how the external and internal dimensions of resilience interact. It was explained that resilience is not just about state institutions but also about society. This posed a significant challenge for the EU because it means that external action has to focus on local communities in all parts of fragile states, rather than just government authorities in key urban areas. The EU needs to be careful about how it thinks and approaches the concept of resilience. There are different types of resilience. For example, it was explained that authoritarian regimes might be classed in some way as 'resilient' in the short term but it was not possible to do so over the longer term. Resilience is therefore not necessarily about governments that are in power today but rather about the longer-term socio-economic resilience of a country and/or region.

Building on this point, another panellist explained how resilience will require far greater coherence between the EU's internal and external security actors and institutions. For example, the need to ensure that justice and home affairs, development and humanitarian and security and defence actors work together is not problem free. The EU Global Strategy has emphasised the need for EU actors to work more closely together, but there is still some way to go before a truly integrated approach to crises is possible. Accordingly, it is all very well asking whether the EU Global Strategy has altered member states' foreign and security policies, but it is equally important that all the relevant EU institutions live up to the vision contained in the EU Global Strategy as well.

Session 2: Implementing the security and defence aspects

The second session focused on three of the concrete initiatives that have emerged since the publication of the EU Global Strategy: the European Defence Fund, the MPCC and the CARD. One of the more tangible results on security and defence since June 2016 has been the creation of a European Defence Fund. It was explained how the fund represents a game changer in the way the EU thinks and supports defence cooperation. Financial incentives for defence research and joint capability development represent a new method of cooperation, but it is important to not only focus on the financial value of the fund as it also represents a new culture of cooperation that needs to be developed. The intergovernmental method will continue to characterise defence cooperation in the EU but the defence fund is designed to work with member states to develop common defence projects. Addressing the potential challenges facing the defence fund, it was explained that industry is currently being consulted to ensure that the fund is calibrated

efficiently. The European Commission is also thinking about how to calibrate the defence research and defence capability components of the fund.



Another initiative being developed is the Military Planning and Conduct Capability and the audience learned that the MPCC is in the final stages of becoming operational. The operational requirements of the EU made it clear why the EU needs a permanent structure to command and control its non-executive CSDP military operations. When the MPCC is fully operational a single point of command will oversee the EU's ongoing training missions to the Central African Republic, Mali and Somalia. A crucial aspect of the MPCC is calibrating structures within the EEAS, especially in terms of the personnel required to staff the MPCC and in relation to time management. The Director of the MPCC will also simultaneously serve as Director General of the EU Military Staff. Another challenge related to the MPCC is how to enhance civ-mil synergies under CSDP. In this regard, a joint planning cell bridging MPCC efforts with the Civilian Planning and Conduct Capability (CPCC) is being developed. It was broadly acknowledged that the establishment of the MPCC would enhance the EU's ability to rapidly and effectively deploy certain military operations.

Turning to the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence, the audience learned that CARD needs to operate in a transparent manner. Looking towards a test-run of the CARD at the end of 2017, one of the challenges facing the European Defence Agency (EDA) is to build trust between the agency and EU member states. To this end, the EDA is working on a bilateral basis with member states to build trust. Without this trust, it was acknowledged that member states would not feel entirely comfortable with sharing vital information on their defence planning. Here, it was explained that the CARD test-run will be a vital exercise as it will allow the EDA to think about how best to organise the review and ensure that the information supplied by member states can lead to greater defence planning synchronisation in the EU and to the identification of potential opportunities for defence cooperation in the future.

Looking at all of these initiatives together, one panellist called on the EU to be mindful of the purpose of further progress on European defence. Acknowledging that the initiatives agreed to at the end of 2016 were welcome and interesting, the strategic circumstances dictate that Europe must now start focusing on output. This is especially the case in terms of defence capabilities. The audience learned how the EU Global Strategy was principally a response to Russia's resurgence, Daesh and insecurity in the southern neighbourhood rather than internal challenges. In this respect, the EU should try and capitalise on the genuine desire by a number of EU member states to cooperate on defence. One of the challenges moving forward, however, is to ensure that the EU has a clear sense of what it wants to achieve as a defence actor. This is important given that sophisticated weapons systems are proliferating into the hands of militarily weaker players, and once relatively easily accessible theatres are becoming harder to penetrate.

As the EU thinks about how to deepen defence cooperation it cannot forget about the strategic and military constraints in which it will operate.

Following a question from the audience on the various defence initiatives and PeSCo, several panellists explained that initiatives such as the defence fund and CARD were designed as stand-alone initiatives. PeSCo could be a political catalyst to enhance defence efforts, although should the member states decide not to trigger article 46 of the Treaty on European Union then the defence fund and CARD will nonetheless remain core elements of EU defence cooperation. Continuing the debate on PeSCo, one of the panellists argued that permanent structured cooperation would only really make sense if it led to tangible results. There may be many political reasons to initiate PeSCo but it should above all else ensure that the EU becomes a more convincing defence actor.

Session 3: The internal-external nexus, resilience and Libya

The final session began with a sober assessment of the realities on the ground in Libya. Many of the panellists alluded to the fact that the EU's efforts are not being felt throughout the country. The audience learned that EU efforts are too Tripoli-centric and in order to really have an integrated approach to the Libya crisis, the EU needs to start communicating and working with communities located across the whole of Libya. It was, however, acknowledged that an EU presence across Libya would be challenging given the security situation on the ground. Different groups 'govern' different regions and towns and this makes it difficult for the EU to find entry points outside Tripoli. The example of the EU's border assistance mission to Libya (EUBAM Libya) and the EU Delegation to Libya both being located in Tunis rather than Libya was cited.

The EU's presence in Libya was a recurring topic during the session but participants learned that the EU is making progress through its naval mission to the region (EUNAVFOR MED Sophia). While it was acknowledged that the mission operates under strict geographical constraints because it cannot venture into Libyan territory, the mission is leading to the type of surveillance and action required to address human trafficking networks and weapons proliferation. The EU is also trying to build security capacity in Libya but these efforts face specific challenges that cannot entirely be addressed given the political situation in Libya. This is regrettable given that Libya encapsulates all the issues addressed by the EU Global Strategy. Given the constraints of operating in Libya, a focus is required on building the joint effectiveness of the European External Action Service, Frontex, EuropeAid and CSDP. With a specific reference to migration and the Central Mediterranean route, it was pointed out that intra-EU coordination on Libya was vital – especially given the ongoing implementation of the Malta Declaration agreed in February 2017.



Many of the panellists alluded to the vast geographical space and borders of Libya, which make dealing with human trafficking routes into Libya from the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa extremely challenging. Again, it was suggested that the EU is struggling to deal with transit routes because of a lack of presence, little local buy-in along Libya's southern border and because the human trafficking trade is still lucrative business. On this last point, one panellist explained that more needs to be done to address the economy of trafficking in the south of Libya, as individuals can still earn sizeable amounts of money by partaking in the trafficking trade. Accordingly, the audience learned that the source of human trafficking in Libya and the wider region is kilometres away from the operational focus of EUNAVFOR MED Sophia. When looking for possible solutions to the human trafficking problem one panellist pointed to the experiences of Algeria because minimal flows of people enter Libya via Algeria. It was suggested that the EU studies why Algeria has been able to stem the flow of human trafficking.

Participants learned of the EU's broader efforts in Libya including EU funding of over €100 million for economic recovery, border management, public administration reform and health. Despite this contribution, however, several panellists argued that money is not enough if the EU is to have an effective strategy for Libya. The EU was urged to recognise that Libya requires more than financial assistance as the country is undergoing a large-scale economic crisis in which resources and money are in short supply. Other speakers questioned how far €100 million would go in Libya, especially as it seems that financial assistance is not reaching the most critical parts of the country. Additionally, the delivery of assistance can be challenging as there is a lack of choice for implementing partners on the ground, which can lead to slow delivery and poor quality assistance. Another panellist raised the issue of the EU's financial assistance modalities and it was claimed that EU funds cannot easily be deployed in Libya due to financing 'ceilings' that mean targeted assistance for relatively low levels of financial support are restricted. This is important because these financial 'ceilings' mean that low-cost, high-impact projects in Libya are not being funded.

A final point was raised about the EU's restrictive measures on individuals in Libya. This was perhaps one of the more sensitive areas of discussion. On the one hand, several panellists explained how the EU's restrictive measures are not as effective as hoped. On the other hand, the audience learned that some of the restrictive measures on arms and equipment may be impeding Libya's ability to police its own borders. Some of the restrictions on economic activities may also be a hindrance to Libya's economic recovery. Despite these points, however, it was acknowledged that given Libya's present state of flux, the EU's restrictive measures would remain in place.

Note: the views of the panellists and participants do not necessarily reflect the views of the Maltese Presidency of the Council of the EU or the EU Institute for Security Studies. Each contribution was made in a personal capacity.