

**The ABC of European Union Strategy:
Ambition, Benchmark, Culture**

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**THE ABC OF EUROPEAN UNION STRATEGY:
AMBITION, BENCHMARK, CULTURE**

Sven BISCOP



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Introduction¹

Europe does not threaten anyone, Europe is geared to stability; Europe has no enemies nor does it have territorial aspirations. It could be a heavy-weight force, but Europe as a whole is still reluctant to accept its role as a global player.

Egon Bahr²

The adoption of the *European Security Strategy* (ESS) by the December 2003 European Council was a landmark event for the European Union (EU) as an international actor. Of course, the ESS was not handed down in the shape of stone tablets. It is not because something is written in the ESS that it necessarily will be so, nor is everything written in the ESS. But the simple fact that it is omnipresent – in EU discourse, in statements by European as well as other policy-makers, in the debate in think tanks and academia – proves that its importance should not be underestimated either. It is after all the first ever strategic document covering the whole of EU foreign policy, from aid and trade to diplomacy and the military. As such it is first of all a statement of the EU's ambition as an international actor, and has therefore become the reference framework guiding the EU's performance as well as the benchmark to judge it. Through its performance the EU at the same time is developing a strategic culture of its own, the maturation of which is helped forward by the ESS. Ultimately however, what really counts, and what determines the consolidation of the EU's strategic culture, is whether the EU, through its policies and actions, is able to achieve results and realize its ambitions.

1. Prof. Dr. Sven Biscop is a senior research fellow at Egmont – The Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels and visiting professor at the College of Europe in Bruges. This paper was commissioned by the T.M.C. Asser Institute in The Hague. The final version will be included in the edited volume resulting from the 37th Asser Colloquium on European Law, 'The European Union and International Crisis Management: Legal and Policy Aspects' (The Hague, 11-12 October 2007). The author offers warm thanks to Dr. Christoph O. Meyer (King's College, London) and Alexander Mattelaer (Institute for European Studies, Vrije Universiteit Brussel) for their helpful comments on the first draft of the text.

2. Egon Bahr, *Europe's Strategic Interests – The Role of German Foreign and Security Policy en Route to European Self-Determination and Global Responsibility*. Brussels, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung – EU Office, April 2007.

Global Ambition and Mission Statement

The EU's ambitions are unequivocally expressed in the ESS, which states that 'As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world's Gross National Product (GNP), and with a wide range of instruments at its disposal, the European Union is inevitably a global player'. This global ambition is not limited to aid and trade, areas in which the EU has long been a global power, but includes the politico-military dimension: 'Europe should be ready to share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world'. In achieving that aim, the military is however an instrument of last resort. The emphasis is on a holistic approach, putting to use the full range of instruments, through partnerships and multilateral institutions, for a permanent policy of prevention and stabilization: 'The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order'. The ESS must thus first of all be seen as the mission statement of the EU as an international actor. As Major and Riecke say: 'If the constitutional treaty defines the European Union's *finalité intérieure*, then the ESS outlines its *finalité extérieure*, tackling not just security questions but also issues relating to the European Union's identity, values and political philosophy'.³

This *finalité* can be conceptualized through the notion of global public goods (GPG). Physical security or freedom from fear; economic prosperity or freedom from want; political freedom or democracy, human rights and the rule of law; and social wellbeing or education, health services, a clean environment etc.: these 'goods' are global or universal because – at least in the EU view – everybody is entitled to them; and they are public because it is the responsibility of public authorities at all levels of government to provide citizens with access to them. The gap between haves and have-nots in terms of access to these core GPG is at the heart of economic instability, mass migration, frustration, extremism and conflict, from the negative effects of which Europe cannot be insulated. Ultimately therefore, in today's globalized world, Europe can only be secure if everybody is secure, as it is expressed by the subtitle of the ESS: *A Secure Europe in a Better World*. Even though at first sight it may seem otherwise, because of this interdependence the four core GPG are marked by non-excludability and non-rivalry. They are also inextricably related – one needs access to all four in order to enjoy any one – and they are present in every foreign policy issue, hence

3. Claudia Major and Henning Riecke, 'Europe's Little Blue Book. More Strategic Debate in the European Union', in *Internationale Politik (Transatlantic Edition)*, Vol. 7, 2006, No. 3, p. 45.

the need for a holistic approach: all policies must address the four dimensions simultaneously in order to achieve durable results rather than just combat the symptoms of underlying issues. Working proactively to diminish inequality and increase access to GPG is the basis of prevention and stabilization, and because the EU does not want to impose, it does so through partnerships with other States and regions and through rule-based multilateral institutions.

Does this approach constitute a ‘European way’ that makes the EU into a distinctive type of power? Is the EU a power at all, a notion which the ESS itself does not mention?⁴ Yet, implicitly the ESS certainly expresses the EU’s ambition to be a global power, although in reality the united will to act on that is lacking all too often still. Nevertheless, the EU does influence events and developments worldwide, certainly in the economic sphere, also in the sphere of norms and values, and much less consistently but increasingly so in the politico-military sphere. The comparison with the indeed much more purposive and resolute American power hides the fact that after the US the EU is generally seen as the world’s second power – or who else would that be? Part of the reason why the perception is often distorted is that the EU consciously uses its power in a different way than the US, preferring persuasion over coercion, multilateralism over unilateralism, and diplomacy over the military. Different characterisations of the EU have been provided: a soft power, preferring non-military instruments; a civilian power, aimed at changing the international environment rather than expanding its interests (or at ‘milieu’ rather than ‘possession goals’); a normative power, a model for others in terms of norms and values; a transformative power, seeking to export its own political, social and economic model;⁵ or a tranquil power (‘puissance tranquille’), averse to power projection.

All of these catch part of what the EU is doing. The core of EU strategy is indeed to transform others by exporting its own model. Linking together political, economic and social reform and security cooperation through partnership and conditionality, this holistic approach, *if* it is effectively implemented, is actually very proactive and intrusive – for Dannreuther and Peterson the ESS therefore signals that like the US, the EU sees itself as a transformational and even a revolutionary power.⁶ Being a model for others to emulate is not sufficient to be a power – as Telo warns, Europe then runs the risk of ending up like ‘something of a cultural

4. Richard Whitman, ‘Road Map for a Route March? (De-)civilianizing through the EU’s Security Strategy’, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 11, 2006, No. 1, p. 9.

5. Interestingly, ‘transformational diplomacy’ is also the State Department concept for the ‘new’ American diplomacy. Justin Vaisse, *Transformational Diplomacy*. Chaillot Paper No. 103. Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2007.

6. Roland Dannreuther and John Peterson, ‘Conclusion: Alliance Dead or Alive?’, in Roland Dannreuther and John Peterson (eds.), *Security Strategy and Transatlantic Relations*. London, Routledge, 2006, p. 181.

beacon, fit only for ceremonial purposes, much like Greece's role within the Roman empire'.⁷ Power cannot be tranquil but implies the will to actively shape events and developments, *in casu* to proactively promote what according to the political choice made by the EU are the core GPG.⁸ Furthermore, hard power, from economic sanctions to military intervention if necessary, is part of the EU toolbox, as an emergency brake in case of grave human rights violations, the invocation of the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P),⁹ and threats to peace and security. The EU's distinctiveness lies perhaps in the positive, indeed progressive tone of its project. Rather than being threat-based, it is constructive,¹⁰ aimed at achieving positive objectives, which are of course in the enlightened self-interest of the EU – that is what policy is about – but which also directly benefit others and thus express a feeling of responsibility¹¹ for and solidarity with the have-nots. In that sense, the EU could also be described as a positive power – to advance just one more label.¹²

7. Mario Telò, *Europe: A Civilian Power? European Union, Global Governance, World Order*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2006, p. 59.

8. Although the universality of some of the GPG cannot honestly be denied, notably human rights, it is a political choice what to promote as the core GPG. Rotberg simply uses the term 'political goods'. Ortega points out however that 'most indicators point towards a multiplication of demands' regarding 'new principles: peacekeeping, democracy [...], free trade, protection of the environment and multilateralism'. Martin Ortega, *Building the Future. The EU's contribution to Global Governance*. Chaillot Paper No. 100. Paris, EU Institute for Security Studies, 2007, pp. 31 and 56. Robert I. Rotberg, 'Strengthening Governance: Ranking Countries Would Help', in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 28, 2004, No. 1, pp. 71-81.

9. Endorsed at the UN Millennium+5 Summit in September 2005, R2P implies that if a State is unable or unwilling to protect its own population, or is itself the perpetrator of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes or crimes against humanity, national sovereignty must give way to a responsibility to protect on the part of the international community. In such cases, the Security Council must mandate intervention, if necessary by military means.

10. 'The EU is *not* attempting to compete militarily with other world powers, the EU is *not* building up a military capacity independent of that of its member states, the EU is *not* trying to acquire WMD, the EU has *no* territorial claims to make, the EU does *not* intend to intervene militarily to change regimes, and the EU is determined to work hand-in-hand with the United Nations. In short, as it embodies a new category of international actor, the EU's approach to global relations is different from the traditional approach of major powers. As a consequence, the rest of the world welcomes the European Union as a new kind of more constructive actor in global relations.' Martin Ortega, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

11. On this issue, see Hartmut Mayer and Henri Vogt (eds.), *A Responsible Europe? Ethical Foundations of EU External Affairs*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2006.

12. Sven Biscop, *The European Security Strategy – A Global Agenda for Positive Power*. Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2005.

Benchmark and Reference Framework

Because it so clearly expresses the choice for the holistic approach, the ESS at the same time is more than a mission statement or expression of ambition. It really is a strategy in the broad, public management meaning of the term:¹³ a policy-making tool which, on the basis of EU values and interests, outlines the long-term overall policy objectives to be achieved and the basic categories of instruments to be applied to that end, which serves as a reference framework for day-to-day policymaking in a rapidly evolving and increasingly complex international environment, and which guides the definition of the means – i.e. the civilian and military capabilities – that need to be developed. One should therefore not be misled by the semantic confusion that is often created – consciously or unconsciously – by authors inspired by strategic studies in the realist school.¹⁴ The ESS is indeed not a strategy in the narrow, military sense of the term. Nor was it meant to be: in spite of its misleading – and perhaps mistaken – title, rather than a security or defence strategy it is an international or foreign policy strategy that addresses the whole of external action. As on the international scene it is much more than a military actor, no useful analysis of EU strategy can be limited to military strategy. Such a foreign policy strategy is of course not an operational document, but has to be translated into sub-strategies, policies and actions – including a military strategy – which for that matter also applies to the US *National Security Strategy*. It has what Alyson Bailes has called an inspiring function vis-à-vis policy-making.¹⁵ In fact, if the ESS is read together with the many existing sub-strategies and policies, the EU probably has a much more explicit strategic concept than many of the individual Member States.

The choice for the holistic approach is not a new, let alone a revolutionary one. Rather the ESS is the codification of a strategic orientation that had already emerged through the practice of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which came into being ten years before its adoption and which in turn had its roots in European Political Cooperation (EPC) of the 1970s-1980s. Herein lies the strength of the ESS: it represents a fundamental consensus

13. Which, the author feels, is not so broad as to validate Strachan's view that 'the word "strategy" has acquired a universality which has robbed it of meaning, and left it only with banalities'. Hew Strachan, 'The Lost Meaning of Strategy', in *Survival*, Vol. 47, 2005, No. 3, p. 34.

14. See e.g. François Heisbourg, 'The "European Security Strategy" is not a Security Strategy', in Steven Everts et al. (eds.), *A European Way of War*. London, Centre for European Reform, 2004, pp. 27-39. Asle Toje, 'The 2003 European Union Security Strategy: A Critical Appraisal', in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 10, 2005, No. 1, pp. 117-133. James H. Wylie, 'Measuring up. The Strategies as Strategy', in Roland Dannreuther and John Peterson (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 165-177.

15. Alyson Bailes, *The European Security Strategy – An Evolutionary History*. Policy Paper No. 10. Stockholm, SIPRI, 2005, p. 14.

between the Member States, the roots of which go much deeper than the temporary circumstances surrounding the document's adoption.

Nevertheless there was a chance that the ESS would disappear soon after its adoption, that it would be nothing more than a one-off demonstration of regained unity after the intra-European divide over Iraq, a step of high symbolic value but with little impact on actual policy-making. A stratagem rather than a strategy... The ESS has proved to be too evoking a document for that to happen however.¹⁶ It is indeed one of the most spread and read EU documents among the general public and frequently appears on reading lists at colleges and universities around the world. Within the EU, in many policy documents and decisions on different aspects of foreign policy, especially those relating to the CFSP and its military dimension, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), the guidelines fixed by the ESS are constantly being referred to, as in the speeches by High Representative Javier Solana and in the discourse of EU representatives generally. Edwards speaks of a genuine “agitation architecture” geared to “mainstreaming” ESS issues’.¹⁷ The ESS also serves as the connecting thread throughout the courses for practitioners from the Member States organised by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). In the decision-making process, the European institutions as well as a number of Member States make good tactical use of the ESS: the more convincingly a proposed initiative can be linked to it, the more difficultly it can be opposed.

That does not mean that the ESS is always first on policy-makers minds when policies have to be designed and decisions made. In many cases, its presence is implicit and it is *de facto* being implemented, precisely because it is an expression of continuity in EU foreign policy practice. But even though it is not always explicitly referred to, the codification of this strategic orientation in the ESS is important, because it strengthens its status and makes it more difficult – though not impossible – to transgress the boundaries of this reference framework, and thus promotes coherence and consistency. Because the ESS has remained so present in the official discourse and in the academic and political debate, it has effectively become the benchmark to judge EU performance. This certainly holds true for third States and organizations: even if it would want to, the outside world would not allow the EU to forget the ESS, which it reads as a binding statement of what the Union aims to achieve and which therefore generates demands and expectations. The ESS has thus very much become part of the identity of the EU.

16. Sven Biscop and Jan Joel Andersson (eds.), *The EU and the European Security Strategy – Forging a Global Europe*. London, Routledge, 2007.

17. Geoffrey Edwards, ‘Is There a Security Culture in the Enlarged European union?’, in *The International Spectator*, Vol. 41, 2006, No. 3, pp. 7-23.

Naturally, the ESS is not a perfect strategy. Its drafters could only build on consensus in areas where that existed. On a number of issues it remains particularly vague because consensus was absent or not yet strong enough. Many issues are mentioned in the ESS, because not to do so would have invoked strong criticism, but no more than that. No real choices are made on notably the nature of the transatlantic partnership and the degree of autonomy of the EU as an international actor, nor on the nature of the strategic partnerships with Russia, China and others. Another area in which thinking remains vague is that covered by the narrow definition of strategy: the conditions for the use of force under the EU flag. But a strategy it is...

Strategic Culture

If the EU is a global power, equipped with a foreign policy strategy, the question can be asked whether something like a strategic culture is developing at the EU level. The ESS in any case stresses that ‘We need to develop a strategic culture that fosters early, rapid, and when necessary, robust intervention’.

Again there is an issue of definition.¹⁸ If strategic culture is understood as concerning only the use of hard power in the implementation of strategy, then it is easy to deride the EU for its lack of strategic culture, for this is indeed the least developed dimension of EU thinking. Some almost make it appear as if only a strategic culture that emphasises the use of force can be a strong or ‘good’ strategic culture... But the EU is more than a military actor and, more importantly, in the ESS explicitly puts strategic culture clearly in the context of its distinctive holistic approach: ‘This applies to the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention at our disposal, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities’.¹⁹ Therefore a widened definition of strategy must be adopted, as stated above, and thus the definition of strategic culture too must be widened accordingly. Surely a concept that was originally shaped by the study of Cold War nuclear strategy must be updated to be a useful tool of analysis in the world of today. Building on Snyder’s definition as amended by Gray, strategic culture can therefore be defined as ‘the sum total of ideas, conditioned emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behaviour that members of a [strategic community] have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to [strategy]’.²⁰

In the case of the EU, the strategic community concerned is a very diverse one. It comprises various actors at the EU level, at the political as well as the administrative level, both individuals and collective entities, and the latter intergovernmental as well as supranational, including among others: Javier Solana; the Policy Unit; the Political and Security Committee (PSC), the Military Committee

18. Gray remarks that ‘The ability of scholars to make a necessarily opaque concept like strategic culture even less penetrable is truly amazing’ or, as worded more positively by Booth, applying the concept is ‘an art rather than science’. Ken Booth, ‘Strategic Culture: Validity and Validation’, in *Oxford Journal on Good Governance*, vol. 2, 2005, No. 1, p. 26. Colin S. Gray, *Out of the Wilderness: Prime Time for Strategic Culture*. Fort Belvoir (Va.), Defense Threat Reduction Agency, 2006, p. 9.

19. Howorth prefers the term ‘security culture’, ‘because it is more neutral politically and [...] is more appropriate as a label for whatever collective mindset is in fact taking shape in the EU’. Jolyon Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2007, p. 178.

20. Colin S. Gray, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

(EUMC) and their subsidiary working groups; different units in the Council Secretariat, including the Military Staff (EUMS); the Commission, notably the Relex group of Commissioners; and different units in the various Commission directorates-general. The constant interaction in e.g. the PSC is a very important factor in forging a strategic culture. Because a substantial part of EU foreign policy remains intergovernmental and decisions are made by the Member States, the strategic community also includes relevant actors in the capitals of the twenty-seven. Some of the Member States have strong national strategic cultures, which differ very much between them, while those of others are much less developed. The EU strategic culture is therefore an additional layer to the national level and the two levels mutually influence each other. Through the annual High-Level Course and the numerous Orientation Courses, the ESDC is actively diffusing the EU strategic culture among the decision-makers in the capitals.

The heterogeneity of the EU strategic community leads to the expectation that a strategic culture will develop more slowly; it also makes it more difficult to analyse. Yet when assessing the discourse and especially the practice of the actors involved, it seems fair to say that a collective strategic culture is developing at the EU level, which is distinct from the national level. There is such a thing as a 'typically European way' of responding to foreign policy issues, while it is equally – or perhaps even more – clear that some responses are not expected from the EU or even considered contradictory to its nature. That does not mean that the EU always provides a response to every issue that it is confronted with: alas the Member States all too often do not find consensus. Then the EU level disappears and it is up to each Member to wage a national policy, which will be determined by its national strategic culture. But if consensus is found and the EU as such makes policy, there is an increasingly clear idea of *how* it can and should act. As polls on e.g. the Iraq crisis showed, at a general level this idea is also shared by public opinion throughout the EU. To some extent, one could even speak of export of this strategic culture to other organizations; it is interesting to see e.g. how NATO has adopted part of the EU discourse on the holistic approach and integrated civilian-military operations.

EU strategic culture is strongest when it comes to the long-term, permanent policy of stabilization and prevention, which is also the most supranational dimension of EU foreign policy. It is much less strong when it comes to the application of coercive instruments, especially the use of military force. This is probably the issue on which national strategic cultures differ the most, with some Member States more inclined to use the military instrument and others more averse to any type of intervention (which is sometimes translated into constitutional constraints). Arguably however, what impedes the development of a strong strategic

culture in this regard is not so much that Member States have extremely different views about when and how to use force, but rather that they remain very much divided about *who* should use force when necessary. Because a number of Atlantic-oriented Member States feel that high-intensity military operations should remain the prerogative of NATO or ad hoc coalitions, consensus can often not be found to act at all as EU.²¹ The case of Iraq can illustrate this. The real intra-European divide over Iraq did not concern the substance and principles of policy. Based on an assessment of past policies, it can safely be argued that all Member States agree that in principle the use of force is an instrument of last resort which requires a Security Council mandate. The real issue at stake was the nature of the transatlantic partnership. If the US reverts to the use of force in a situation in which the EU in principle would not do so, or not yet, what then has priority for the EU: steering an autonomous course, based on its own principles, or supporting its most important ally? The subsequent case of Iran, in which the EU has taken the lead, demonstrates that *au fond* Member States very much agree about how to deal with a proliferation issue.

The *Paper for Submission to the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, which was approved by the Council for transferral to the Panel in May 2004, provides an interesting summary of the main tenets of the European approach. In it the EU first reaffirms its commitment to the holistic approach, stressing the need for ‘economic, political and legal instruments, as well as military instruments, and close cooperation between states as well as international organizations across a range of sectors’. When crisis management is in order, a gradual and comprehensive process of intervention is outlined, going from ‘the reinforcement of institutions, the security system, and the promotion of economic and social development’, through ‘the mandating of a civilian mission’, to ‘carefully targeted sanctions’ and finally, ‘if warranted by ongoing security conditions and crisis management needs, the mandating of a rapid reaction force and/or a military peacekeeping mission’. This process of intervention would particularly apply in case of ‘actual or threatened failure of state institutions’ and in a ‘responsibility to protect’ scenario.

Meyer’s impressive empirical research concludes that there is ‘a new European consensus that the use of military force abroad can be legitimate for the purpose of protecting vulnerable ethnic groups against massive violations of their human

21. Giegerich makes the point with regard to the UK: ‘The most striking feature has to be the high degree of overlap between the norms of British strategic culture and ESDP [...] The only clear clash [...] exists on the dimension of preferred areas of cooperation [...] the traditional position of British policy-makers is to favour NATO’. Bastian Giegerich, *European Security and Strategic Culture. National Responses to the EU’s Security and Defence Policy*. Baden-Baden, Nomos, 2006, pp. 84-85.

rights'.²² Other elements of this consensus, which Meyer dubs 'humanitarian power Europe', are the need to obtain Security Council authorization and to avoid 'collateral damage', and the view of the use of force as a last resort. Howorth too finds that Member States are shifting towards 'a common acceptance of integrated European interventionism, based not solely on the classical stakes of national interest, but also on far more idealistic motivations such as humanitarianism and ethics'.²³ Freedman describes this as 'a move from defensive to offensive liberal wars', which reflects 'the growing importance of the norms of human and minority rights'²⁴ or, in other words, the concept of human security.²⁵ Clearly, interventions for these reasons have become increasingly acceptable for those Member States too that are less inclined to use the military instrument. If the EU would continue to develop an activist strategic culture along these lines, that would indeed fit in with the idea of a 'positive' or 'responsible' power that assumes its part of the responsibility for global security.

In spite of the remaining internal divide between 'Atlanticists' and 'Europeanists', and highlighting the growing consensus on 'European interventionism', the EU is 'doing' more and more. It is therefore far too early to speak of EU strategic culture as something definite. Each time the EU undertakes a new type of task, in new regions of the world, this is incorporated into its strategic culture, which is thus very much developing by doing. This is especially true in the field of military and civilian ESDP operations, but also in the area of responding to political upheaval in third States, e.g. the EU reaction to developments in Ukraine. EU strategic culture is still being shaped because the EU itself is continually evolving. The adoption of the ESS can be seen as the codification of strategic culture as it had developed up to that point. At the same time, it promotes the consolidation of strategic culture, because it enhances the strategic community's awareness of strategic issues and thus promotes strategic debate and – hopefully – a degree of 'self-reflexivity'²⁶ that ought to impede the EU from disregarding its own shortcomings.

If strategic culture is developing by doing, it is but one of the factors however that determines what is being done. First and foremost, the Member States have

22. Christoph O. Meyer, *The Quest for a European Strategic Culture. Changing Norms on Security and Defence in the European Union*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2006, p. 141.

23. Jolyon Howorth, 'Discourse, Ideas and Epistemic Communities in European Security and Defence Policy', in *West European Politics*, vol. 27, 2004, No. 2, p. 212.

24. Lawrence Freedman, *The Transformation of Strategic Affairs*. Adelphi Paper No. 379. London, International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2006, p. 39.

25. Janne Haaland Matlary, 'When Soft Power Turns Hard: Is an EU Strategic Culture Possible?', in *Security Dialogue*, Vol. 37, 2006, no. 1, pp. 105-121.

26. Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"', in *Millennium*, Vol. 33, 2005, No. 3, pp. 613-636.

to find the political will to act, and to act as EU. Not the development of a strategic culture, but the results of its policies determine whether the EU is an effective global power. The proof of the pudding is in the eating – not in drawing up the recipe.

A Mixed Performance

The ESS offers both a sound concept and an ambitious agenda for EU foreign policy, but judging by its performance the EU must become 'more active', to use the words of the ESS, in fully and sincerely implementing it. This requires more political courage and more as well as better capabilities.

Global Crisis Management and the Elaboration of a Military Strategy

While there is an increasingly clear idea of why and how the EU should intervene, and while the EU is increasingly active in implementing that idea through crisis management and preventive diplomacy, its commitment shows a low degree of consistency, both geographically and in terms of the types of operations undertaken.

The Member States are certainly not averse to deploying their forces, but geographically the large majority is deployed on the Balkans, in Europe's backyard where the EU and its Member States logically assume responsibility, and in Afghanistan and Iraq, as a follow-up to the interventions – one rather more controversial than the other – initiated by the US and a number of EU Member States themselves. The large contingent of nearly 8,000 blue helmets from EU Member States in Lebanon is a positive example of EU commitment and provides an enormous opportunity to increase the EU's standing in the Middle East, if the diplomatic follow-up is assured. But it contrasts sharply with the 1,000 troops of EUFOR RDC reluctantly deployed in the DR Congo in 2006. The same applies to Darfur: only after the African Union took on the operation did the reluctance to intervene give way to intense EU-NATO competition to gain visibility through second-line support for the AU. Only in mid-2007 did the EU then start to consider an operation in neighbouring Chad as an additional contribution. Participation in other UN operations than UNIFIL, notably in Sub-Saharan Africa, remains minimal: in July 2007 the EU27, Lebanon set aside, accounted for less than 3,500 out of nearly 84,000 'blue helmets' or just 4.1%.

Most Member States do put their forces in harm's way in national, NATO or coalitions-of-the-willing operations. Yet although legally the EU's Petersberg Tasks include operations at the high end of the spectrum of violence, politically the Member States, as stated above, are still extremely divided over the use of force under the EU flag. When Member States rest divided the EU-level is out of the loop. Consequently, even though the EU has proven that it can mount high-

risk operations if the political will is present, most EU-led operations are of lower intensity and often of smaller scale. The still very young ESDP needs a number of successes to legitimize itself, hence the tendency to select operations with a large chance of success. To some extent therefore the criticism is justified that the EU takes on important but mostly ‘less difficult’ operations, in the post-conflict phase, in reaction to the settlement of a conflict – a criticism which can of course be applied to the international community as a whole. Nevertheless one must question whether the Member States are willing to fully accept the implications of the strong EU diplomatic support for R2P, which if it comes to military intervention per definition implies high-intensity operations. This applies in particular to those Member States with constitutional limitations on the use of force: a Member State which systematically does not participate in high-intensity operations breaks solidarity within the EU.

In spite of the global ambitions expressed in the ESS, Member States are thus reluctant to commit large numbers of troops to long-term, large-scale operations outside their immediate periphery or where no direct strategic interests are at stake – where ‘the risks are too high and the stakes are too low’. There is more willingness to implement more specific rapid reaction operations, of relatively smaller scale and limited duration, but for high-intensity operations Member States still habitually look to other frameworks than the EU, in spite of the growing consensus on the need for intervention in R2P-type scenarios. Proactive – military *and* diplomatic – intervention, in the early stages of a crisis, remains difficult to accomplish.

There are, sadly, too many conflicts and crises for the EU to deal effectively with all of them, certainly in a leading role. Prioritisation is therefore inevitable. Two sets of criteria could help to determine in more detail when and where the EU must lead, or make a substantial contribution to, diplomatic and military intervention, up to and including the use of force if necessary and mandated by the Security Council. Intervention must in any case be proactive – the EU should be a true peacemaker. On the one hand, if anywhere in the world the threshold to activate the R2P-mechanism is reached, the EU, in view of its support for the principle, should muster the courage to contribute to its implementation. On the other hand, the EU must also contribute to the resolution of conflicts and crises that are of strategic importance for Europe or, as the EU is a global actor, for the world. This would certainly include the Balkans, the Middle East and the Gulf, but a debate seems in order to further clarify these strategic interests. What would be Europe’s role in case of conflict in North Korea, or in the Caucasus, or if vital energy supplies would be cut off?

At the same time, the collective security system of the UN, and therefore the EU itself, as its main supporter and with two permanent members of the Security Council in its ranks, can only be legitimate if it addresses the threats to *everyone's* security. Too much selectivity undermines the system. Even though it can not always play a leading role, the EU must shoulder a significant share of the responsibility for global peace and security by playing an active role in the Security Council *and* by contributing capabilities to UN crisis management and peacekeeping operations, either as UN-led blue helmets or on 'sub-contracted' EU-led missions. If any automaticity of availability of troops is difficult, a political decision could be made on the order of magnitude of a reasonable European contribution, in function of which the EU can then act as a 'clearing house' for Member States' contributions. If the commitment in Lebanon is a positive example, the current contribution of less than 3,500 blue helmets for the rest of the world and two Battlegroups on stand-by for operations primarily – but not exclusively – at the request of the UN means that the EU is punching below its weight.

All of these commitments require deployable military capabilities that the EU is currently lacking. It must be taken into account that in spite of the large overall numbers of European armed forces – the EU27 have over two million men and women in uniform – the percentage of deployable capabilities is actually rather limited. Many issues have to be addressed: the low cost-effectiveness of a plethora of small-scale capabilities, unnecessary intra-EU duplications, the presence of over 400,000 quasi non-deployable conscripts, capability gaps in terms of 'enablers' (strategic transport, command, control and communications), slow transformation from territorial defence to expeditionary warfare. In view of the need for rotation only one third of the available forces can be deployed at any one time, so the EU27 can field 70 to 80,000 troops. Counting all deployments (national, EU, NATO, UN, ad hoc coalitions), this is what the EU27 effectively are doing today – so a substantial increase in deployments is only possible in the medium to long term, in function of the ongoing transformation of European armed forces. Member States should abandon the national focus that still drives them to strive after full capacity at the national level. Rather than at the level of each individual Member State, the EU27 together must be capable. In fact, a wider political decision is in order, translating the ESS in a military level of ambition based on the full military potential of all Member States: how many forces should the EU27 be able to muster for crisis management as well as for long-term peacekeeping, which reserves does this require, and which capacity must be maintained for territorial defence? Within that framework, *pooling*, by reducing intra-European duplications, can produce much more deployable capabilities within the current combined defence budget. While in the logic of the CFSP and the ESS the political decision to act should be taken at the EU-

level, the actual operation deploying these pooled capabilities can be under EU, NATO or UN command, in function of the situation at hand. The case of Lebanon provides a good illustration of this model.

Together, the two aspects mentioned above, i.e. more detailed guidance on when and where the EU has a responsibility to intervene and a definition of the numbers and types of capabilities required, would constitute the core of an EU military strategy that would link up the ESS and the operational and capability dimensions of ESDP. In parallel, work could be done on the harmonization of military doctrine between Member States, i.e. guidance on how operations must be implemented, e.g. along the lines developed by Mary Kaldor, translating the concept of human security into practical guidelines for operations.²⁷ This should then in turn be reflected in training; all Member States should train at least part of their forces for high-intensity operations.

Permanent Prevention and Conditionality

The EU is very active in prevention and stabilization, notably in its bilateral relations with third countries, via the method of ‘positive conditionality’. In this field the ‘sub-strategies’ are already available: through policy frameworks such as the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) vis-à-vis its neighbouring countries and the Cotonou Agreement vis-à-vis the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, the EU is bringing the holistic approach into practice. By linking them to market access and economic and financial support, the EU aims to stimulate economic, political and social reforms as well as security cooperation, so as to address the root causes and durably change the environment that leads to extremism, crisis and conflict.

Yet, if ‘positive conditionality’ as a theory seems sounds enough, practice is often lagging behind, certainly in countries that do not – immediately – qualify for EU membership. The proverbial carrots that would potentially be most effective in stimulating reform, such as opening up the European agricultural market or setting up a system for legal economic migration, are those that the EU is not willing to consider – in spite of imperative arguments suggesting that Europe would actually benefit from such measures. At the same time, conditionality is seldom applied very strictly. The impression created is that the EU favours stability and economic – and energy – interests over reform, to the detriment of Europe’s soft or normative power. Surprisingly perhaps, in the Medi-

27. Mary Kaldor and Andrew Salmon, ‘Military Force and European Strategy’, in *Survival*, Vol. 48, 2006, No. 1, pp. 19-34.

terranean neighbours e.g. public opinion mostly views the EU as a status quo actor, working with the current regimes rather than promoting fundamental change, whereas, perhaps even more surprisingly after the invasion of Iraq, the United States are seen as caring more sincerely about democracy and human rights.

This lack of EU soft power should not be underestimated. Rather than as the benign, multilateralist actor which the EU considers itself – ‘the one that did not invade Iraq’ – in many southern countries it is first and foremost seen as a very aggressive economic actor. In fact, in the economic sphere the EU often is a very ‘traditional’ power. For many countries, the negative economic consequences of dumping and protectionism – which often cancel out the positive effects of development aid – are far more important and threatening than the challenges of terrorism and proliferation that dominate the western foreign policy agenda, and therefore far more determining for the image of the EU. In the current difficult international climate, the EU model is urgently in need of enhancing its legitimacy.

The EU must therefore muster the courage to effectively apply conditionality. Admittedly, ‘positive conditionality’ requires an extremely difficult balancing act, especially vis-à-vis countries with authoritarian regimes and vis-à-vis great powers like Russia and China: maintaining partnership and being sufficiently critical at the same time. But in that difficult context, the EU could notably show more consistency and resolve in reacting to human rights abuses, which should visibly impact on the relationship with any regime. A much enhanced image and increased legitimacy will follow, notably in the eyes of public opinion, which is a prerequisite for the gradual pursuit of further-reaching political, economic and social reforms. But has the EU really solved the dilemma of stability versus democracy? A debate also seems in order on the desired end-state of especially the ENP. Is the aim incremental progress while maintaining the existing regimes, or full democratization – and if the latter, are EU instruments sufficient or is there an upper limit to what can be achieved via consensual tools such as the ENP?

More generally, the progressive agenda of the ESS risks losing credibility if the EU does not draw the full conclusions from it, notably for its international trade policies. If an exclusive focus on hard security undermines the effectiveness and legitimacy of a policy, so does a one-dimensional focus on trade, without linking it to the political and social (including ecological) dimensions. Rethinking trade and agricultural policies – and migration policy – again demands leaders with enough political courage to further the EU project against certain established

interests. This also leads to the question whether the choices of the ESS have been fully integrated in all parts of the Commission.

Strategic Partners for a United Europe

Implementing the holistic approach requires the active cooperation of all global powers. The UN collective security system can only work if all permanent members actively subscribe to it and refrain from paralyzing or bypassing the Security Council. Conditionality can only work if it is not undermined by actors that disregard human rights and other considerations in their international relations. Another debate therefore is how the EU can persuade strategic partners like Russia and China, and the US, that ‘effective multilateralism’ – as understood by the EU – is in their long-term interest.

The holistic approach cannot be efficiently implemented without changes in the EU machinery. The personal union of the High Representative and the Commissioner for External Relations – ‘the Foreign Minister without title’ – and the European External Action Service provided in the Reform Treaty would allow for the integration of the security, political, social and economic dimensions in all foreign policies, from the creation to the implementation and evaluation of policy. A High Representative with a stronger mandate would also strengthen the EU’s capacity for preventive diplomacy.

Finally, but perhaps most importantly, the ESS can only move from a concept to consistent and resolute action if the EU acts as one. As long as the EU remains divided between ‘Atlanticists’ and ‘Europeanists’ neither the EU nor NATO can be effective actors. Only a united EU has the weight to deal with the challenges of the globalized world and to become a consistent and decisive actor, in an equal partnership with the United States.

Conclusion

Without any doubt, Europe has the potential to be a global power – a power in its own distinctive way, but a power nonetheless. In the economic sphere and in the realm of norms and values, it already is. In the politico-military sphere, its commitment is much less consistent, but also gradually increasing. When the EU does not act, most of the times it is not so much because the Member States differ on the course of action to be followed, but because some Member States prefer to act through other institutions, notably NATO, or to act alone and wage a national foreign policy. Of the three features that according to Hyde-Price²⁸ mark a great power, i.e. the scale of its resources, ‘a sense of responsibility for milieu-shaping, system-management and providing collective goods’, and the willingness to act, it is the latter which is often missing in the EU. Pragmatism in view of the poignant fact that increasingly only a united EU can face the challenges of a globalized world *should* make the Member States mend their ways – whether they *will*, depends on the political leadership.

The adoption of the ESS supports the consolidation of the EU’s international actorness. By reconfirming the strategic orientation that had developed through the practice of CFSP and EPC it has made it more difficult to move outside of that reference framework, thus promoting consistency in EU policy. That explicit reconfirmation has greatly stimulated the strategic debate in Europe and has increased the self-awareness of the European strategic community. Because the document has proved so evocative, it has remained very much present in the debate and has become a benchmark to evaluate EU policy.

Perhaps the ESS would yield even more benefits if the latter two functions, i.e. the strategic debate and the evaluation of EU policy, would be more institutionalized. Because it encompasses the whole of external action, the ESS could provide the framework for a regular comprehensive assessment of EU foreign policy, from trade and development to CFSP and ESDP, e.g. every two years. In every field of external action, the policy documents could be listed as well as the actions undertaken to implement them, including an assessment of their effectiveness. Such a systematic review process would highlight gaps in the translation of the ESS into sub-strategies, policies and actions; it would help to identify inconsistencies between policies in different fields, which often still hinder a truly holistic approach; and it would also show where the gaps are in the ESS itself, i.e. on which issues fundamental strategic choices have yet to be made. It would further provide additional focus for the various EU entities that are

28. Adrian Hyde-Price, *European Security in the Twenty-first Century. The Challenge of Multipolarity*. London, Routledge, 2007, p. 38.

involved in ‘policy planning’ type activities, such as the Forward Studies Unit in the Commission’s DG Relex, the Bureau of European Policy Advisers under the Commission President, and the Policy Unit, while it could stimulate more strategic debate in political bodies such as the PSC. Prepared by the relevant actors in the Council and Commission administration, such a high-level political debate could take place in the European Parliament, but could also take the shape of seminars involving academia, think tanks and media as well as national and EU policy-makers, comparable to the three seminars which the EU organized to discuss the first draft of the ESS in the fall of 2003.

The main question is indeed not whether the ESS should be rewritten or not. The basic approach outlined in it is still valid – the question is rather whether the EU is effectively implementing it. It is important though to keep writing *about* the ESS, in order to keep it on the table and further the strategic debate in Europe. As Carr remarked: ‘Political thought is itself a form of political action. Political science is the science not only of what is, but of what ought to be’.²⁹

29. Edward H. Carr, *The Twenty Year’s Crisis*. Basingstoke, Palgrave, 2001, p. 6.