

THE POWER OF EUROPE AFFIRMING THE EU AS A GLOBAL ACTOR

International Conference

Egmont Palace, Brussels, 7-8 May 2009

Report

Six years almost after the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) and following the December 2008 report on its implementation, the aim of this conference was to concentrate on the current situation of the EU on the international scene and to address the question of its power. Looking at the instruments and means available to the EU in the various dimensions of foreign policy, the objective was to assess the potential of the EU as a power and to identify how and in which fields the Union could or should exercise its power more effectively than it does today.

As the European Union was initially deprived of traditional foreign policy tools, the notion of power remains disputed and has to be qualified as regards its application to a European Union. Given its distinctive features, preliminary remarks of the conference reemphasized the diverse preconditions to be fulfilled by the EU in order to act as an influential actor in particular policy fields. While participants underlined the need for the EU to continue the development of its capabilities, both in civilian and military terms, capabilities were said to form only one of the many “legs” which the EU needs to develop. In this sense, participants underlined the necessity for these instruments to rely on a shared understanding and a clear vision of what the EU objectives on the international scene should be. Common will and shared objectives should form the preconditions and guiding principles of the further development of the EU’s policy tools.

More specifically, Panel 1 concentrated on the relationships of the EU with other powers and on how current trends in the international context may have an impact on the definition of its priorities. How is EU performance on the international stage perceived? How do both internal and international dynamics affect its relations with other international actors?

Power always being defined in relative terms, external developments will necessarily have an impact on the EU’s international status and potential leverage and will thereby have to be taken into account when defining its priorities. Demographic and economic trends slowly contribute to alter the position of the EU and its member states on the global stage. The EU’s ageing population and decreasing contribution to world GDP gradually create new conditions to which the EU will need to adapt. This loss of relative weight will for instance soon translate into changes of voting powers in international organisations. The EU emphasizing its role in “effective multilateralism” and conceiving international frameworks as the central vectors of its international action and influence, its strategy will therefore need to adapt to these new realities and to its loss of institutional power. Clarity about the objectives and unity of EU positions were mentioned as preconditions for the EU to remain influential in these international forums.

The necessity to more concretely define the EU's foreign policy objectives further emerged as a horizontal need. Many EU policies are in this respect still surrounded by uncertainties regarding their concrete objectives. The European Neighbourhood Policy was referred to as a first example of these ambiguities. The exact purpose of the policy and the criteria against which its success will be assessed still remain vague – for instance how do the stated objectives of stabilisation and democratization articulate with one another? The notion of “strategic partnership” also needs to be given a concrete substance. What sort of relationship do these strategic partnerships presume? What concrete added value should they convey for the EU? The relationship of the EU with China served as an example of the persisting ambiguities of the above concept – what does the EU want to achieve in this relationship? How will ideological differences feature in a potential agreement?

Finally, Panel 1 also dealt with the question of the external perception of the EU. A study about the perception of EU “actorness” in the Asia-Pacific region served as a basis for discussion. The study indicates that EU presence in the mass media remains limited and abstract. While according to the polls conducted, the EU is perceived as a political entity, it rarely seems to qualify as an international power. The study further revealed some counter-intuitive findings as it showed that knowledge of the economic power of the EU or its proactiveness in the field of environment policy remains very limited.

The discussions of Panel 2 principally focused on the military component of the ESDP. How effective is the EU as a military actor? What are the lessons to be learned from its previous engagements, and what should be its level of ambition?

While the EU clearly possesses hard power – defined as the power to coerce – in economic terms for instance, its development as a military actor remains recent. Previous and current engagements have proven the usefulness of developing the Union's military capabilities. The assessment of their results remains disputed. While previous engagements have shown the capability of the EU to achieve its military objectives, EU commitments have often been unable to convey lasting results.

In addition, discussions underlined some persisting shortcomings of the ESDP. While the ESS has brought some clarity as to the priorities of EU foreign policy, the question of the availability and relevance of the military tool is still abstractly defined. In this context, it was recalled that the rules of engagement of an ESDP military operation are still too vaguely defined. The necessity to reach agreement between Member states of various traditions and priorities was clearly stated as an obstacle and makes the availability of the EU's military tools unclear. The successful establishment of battle groups changed little in this context as it did not alter Member States' reluctance to commit their troops.

Some words of caution were added as regards the ambitions that could realistically be pursued in the close future. The experience of Afghanistan and its negative fall-outs – having potentially eroded mutual confidence – were referred to as complicating ESDP politics and developments in the near future. Also, Panel 2 insisted on the need to define realistic and clear objectives to be pursued and to be pragmatic as to what ESDP missions can concretely achieve. In this sense, the types of missions and the geographical area in which the EU should or could commit in the future should be integrated in the strategic thinking.

Beginning on the second day of the conference, Panel 3 presented an analysis of the EU's “soft power”. Despite the terminology, this was not “soft power” in the original sense of the term first presented by Joseph Nye, but instead meant all things which were “not traditional power”. Questions addressed included: Does the EU effectively link security issues to development assistance? Is there a coherent trade substrategy for the ESS? Is the EU a power in the field of energy policy?

In order to develop its soft, or (as one panellist preferred) “macro-operationalized” power, the European Union must develop a holistic linkage between security, development, and political reform in areas where it is engaged. Here some progress has been made, as provisions for assistance to fragile states have been maintained and expanded by the European Development Fund and African Partnership Forum even in the midst of challenging economic times.

Despite this progress, there are still many reasons for criticism of the European policies in this field. Most of the additional aid to fragile states has simply been relabelled as such without any real increase. Research by the RAND think-tank has indicated that the United States provides more effective post-conflict support than the EU. One example discussed was the failure of the EU to follow through on its commitments to re-engage in Iraq. There is also concern that EU development aid hollows out local capacities through its focus on high impact development projects and lack of mandates to address governance issues outside of Afghanistan. While there is

reason to doubt the EU's effectiveness, the concerns of many academics that the EU is over-promoting liberal rights are largely mistaken. Instead, it has shown a commitment to engage with local structures regardless of their ideological basis.

On the issue of trade, the third panel quickly found that while there may be a certain amount of coherence between the member states on how trade should be used to promote European security and foreign policy goals, there is no integration and little interaction in developing these positions. Trade policies are very similar to security policy insofar as both are embedded in a long term normative power approach, but there is little focus on the nexus of trade and security issues. An analysis of five main EU trade policy areas between 1995-2009 reveals that trade has been largely de-politicised as the economic interests of European nations overrule their foreign policy and security goals. Additionally, while the objectives of states often converge, constraints from the WTO on how to implement tough trade policy as well as a compartmentalization of EU foreign policies inhibit efforts to integrate approaches to trade policy.

In the field of energy, the EU comes up short as a "power", as it does not have the ability to align its interests enough to pursue a clear strategy. The energy policy of the EU is instead a mix of internal and external policies. There is clearly potential for the EU to be a dominant player, as it has one of the biggest energy markets in the world, but the EU only has competence to act insofar as energy policy interacts with the internal market. The 2005 energy crisis with Ukraine forced EU member states into action on aligning their energy policies, but the newest target cites 2050 as the closest date for aligning policy. If Europe wants to become a "power" in the field of energy, it will need to increase EU investment by at least tenfold from the current €120 million and work to develop a fully fledged external policy for energy.

The members of Panel 4 focused on the EU's "Grand Strategy", and what future direction it should take if, in fact, any such strategy exists. Important questions for framing the debate included: Is it important to develop a "Grand Strategy?" What should an EU "Grand Strategy" consist of? Is the EU itself a "Grand Strategy?"

To begin with, the definition of a "Grand Strategy" is very difficult and uncomfortable to arrive at, as there has traditionally been a close relationship between strategy or grand strategy and war. In a European context, it can best be defined as "an overarching concept that would guide the way in which the EU uses all its means to drive global events and achieve foreign policy goals." This can be broken down into the "dreams, genes, and means": The body of ideas which form the foundation of the strategy are the dreams, the willingness and capability to codify these ideas are the genes, and the power and capability to implement a grand strategy are the means. The EU does not now have a grand strategy, and it does need one, as multilateralism will not suffice to drive global events in a favourable direction. There is currently a movement towards developing such a strategy from the bottom up through harmonization via CFSP/ESDP, but while the EU has some means at its disposal, it won't know what its real needs are until a coherent grand strategy is developed.

To effectively craft a realistic, comprehensive grand strategy which embraces a long term approach, policy-makers must first look at the world in its correct context. Currently, there are two important trends shaping change in the world: the redistribution of power from a unipolar to a multipolar system, and the deepening interdependence between these new centres of power. The redistribution of power towards a multipolar system creates more constraints for all actors; it also increases the ability of smaller powers to effectively block the foreign policy goals of larger ones. The deepening interdependence results from the convergence of economic, energy, and environmental factors as issues that all global powers must address together. This system could develop into an "interpolar" system where major powers depend on and interact with each other on an unprecedented level.

An effective EU strategy for confronting this new, interpolar world should include four axes: selective engagement with global powers, functional cooperation with those powers on systemic challenges, a focus on crisis management, and continued support for political transformation even if such efforts become more difficult.

While the EU has never had a unified "grand strategy", it has tried and largely failed to implement common strategies in the past, particularly in Palestine and Kosovo. It was postulated that this could be due to too much focus on EU interests and on the state level of implementing policy. Efforts to concentrate more on how individuals are affected by government policies might show more results, as the relatively greater ability of Hamas to connect with the individual in Palestine was rewarded with political support. The interests of the population at which policies are aimed, including their religious and cultural heritage, must be taken into account in formulating any strategies.

The panellists had differences in focus, but shared some common conclusions. The EU must be able to build and express a “grand strategy” which does not rely on sub-contracting to the US. This strategy should embrace the new interpolar world, and seek to promote Western norms without making the best the enemy of the good.

Pascal FENDRICH, Assistant, College of Europe
Zach KLEIN, Intern, Egmont

Programme – Day 1

14.30–15.00 *Registration*

15.00–15.30 **Welcome & Introduction**

- Prof. Dr. Sven BISCOP, Egmont
- Prof. Dr. Dieter MAHNCKE, College of Europe

15.30–17.00 **Panel 1: A World of Great Power Relations**

Chair: Stefani WEISS, Director, Brussels Office, Bertelsmann Stiftung

- Prof. Dr. Luk VAN LANGENHOVE, UNU/CRIS
- Richard GOWAN, New York University
- Prof. Dr. MEN Jing, College of Europe
- Prof. Dr. Martin HOLLAND, University of Canterbury, New Zealand

17.00–17.30 *Coffee*

17.30–19.00 **Panel 2: The EU’s “Traditional” Power**

Chair : Dr. Philippe DE LOMBAERDE, UNU-CRIS

- Gen. (ret.) Rainer SCHUWIRTH, former Chief of Staff, SHAPE and former Director General, EUMS
- Prof. Dr. Zaki LAIDI, Sciences Po, Paris
- Daniel KEOHANE, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris

Programme – Day 2

09.30–11.00 **Panel 3: The EU’s “Soft” Power**

Chair: Prof. Dr. Sieglinde GSTÖHL, College of Europe

- Dr. Richard YOUNGS, FRIDE, Madrid
- Fernanda FARIA, European Centre for Development Policy Management, Brussels Office
- Prof. Dr. Jan ORBIE, Ghent University
- Sami ANDOURA, Notre Europe, Paris

11.00–11.30 *Coffee*

11.30–13.00 **Panel 4: The EU’s “Grand Strategy”**

Chair: Dr. Jan Joel ANDERSSON, SIIA, Stockholm

- Dr. Giovanni GREVI, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris
- Prof. Dr. Stephan KEUKELEIRE, Catholic University of Leuven
- Prof. Dr. Richard WHITMAN, University of Bath

13.00–13.15 **Conclusion**

- Joachim FRITZ-VANNAHME, Director, Europe’s Future, Bertelsmann Stiftung
- Prof. Dr. Sven BISCOP, Egmont