



The EU Global Strategy 2020

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As grand strategies go, the 2016 *EU Global Strategy* is a good document. It defines the vital interests of the Union, outlines the principles according to which the EU will act, and sets five clear priorities that constitute an agenda for action. If we want the EU to continue on the course charted by the *Global Strategy*, we will have to review the *Global Strategy*. Once the new Commission is in place following the May 2019 European elections, work should start on writing the *EU Global Strategy 2020*.

The European External Action Service (EEAS) will assess the implementation of the *Global Strategy* since it was presented to the European Council in June 2016. That assessment would be an excellent starting point for the 2020 edition of the *Global Strategy*. There at least three reasons why a strategic review is necessary.

1. A NEW HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

No politician, newly arrived in office, likes to reply, when asked what his or her priorities will be: I will continue to implement the programme that was launched by my predecessor (even though, on occasion, that would be a very good idea). A strategic review will give the next High Representative and Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP) the chance to voice his

or her own priorities, and to shape EU external action accordingly. Otherwise, the risk is that the new HR/VP will not feel ownership of the *Strategy*, might therefore not press for its implementation, and at the same time introduce his or her own priorities through other channels. That could undermine the sense of purpose and strategic direction that a complex foreign policy machinery such as the EU strongly needs. An early review by the new HR/VP, on the contrary, would ensure that as little time as possible would be lost in the transition.

2. A REGULAR AND SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

In any case, if the EU does not review the *Global Strategy* after the 2019 elections, then when will it? The EU does not yet have a system to ensure a regular review of its grand strategy. Absent a settled procedure, whether or not a strategic review takes place depends on circumstances and, of course, consensus between the Member States. The experience of the EU's first grand strategy, the 2003 *European Security Strategy*, teaches that in practice this may lead to a refusal to engage with strategy. A botched attempt at a strategic review in 2007-8 only produced a *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy*, which was soon forgotten – and rightly so. Afterwards, many of those involved seemed to have developed an allergic reaction to strategy. As we now know, it would last until 2016 before the *Global Strategy* was finally presented.

Obviously, no strategic document remains valid for 13 years. A strategy that cannot be touched no longer is a strategy but a dogma. The risk of blindly adhering to a dogma is that one day one will wake up and notice that one has been completely overtaken by events – and by other powers. A regular and systematic strategic review is a necessity therefore. Logically, this would take place every European legislature, after the elections, just like at the national level (at least in those states that have a national security strategy or white paper). A strategic review every five years is none too soon. Even though this once only four years will have elapsed since the *Global Strategy* was published, more than enough has happened to justify a review. Think only of the election of Donald Trump and his subsequent actions, and the fallout of Brexit – and that’s just mentioning our allies (or “allies”).

A regular and systematic review requires a regular and systematic procedure, and a shorter timeline. An assessment of the current *Strategy* by the outgoing HR/VP at the end of her term could become a permanent feature. The first European Council after the elections (in June 2019, in this case) could give a mandate to her eventual successor to present the next edition of the *Strategy* in June 2020.

The next HR/VP could design a procedure that is lighter than the one used to draft the 2016 edition, while maintaining its essential features. A small drafting team, to start with, including at least one expert from outside the EU institutions (who could even be the main penholder, as Dr Nathalie Tocci was for the current *Global Strategy*). Intense consultation with Member States is a second key feature. That consultation should again focus on substance rather than on precise wording, inviting ideas rather than amendments (and avoiding tedious discussions about dots and commas). Finally, input from the academic world should be gathered. If it is based on a

substantial input paper from the drafting team (though not necessarily a full draft text), a single well-organised seminar can suffice.

The subtitle of every subsequent document may vary, but the title can be kept. *Global Strategy* captures exactly what we are talking about: a grand strategy, covering all dimensions of power, and addressing the world.

3. FINETUNING OR REORIENTING

Not every strategic review necessarily leads to a major overhaul of strategy. The point is that not changing the main orientations of one’s strategy should be a conscious decision based on careful analysis, and not the result of inertia or internal blockages (as happened in the EU between 2003 and 2016). Today’s *Global Strategy* requires finetuning rather than overhauling. The five priorities that it outlines remain valid: the security of Europe itself, a stable neighbourhood, an integrated approach to conflict, cooperative regional orders, and effective global governance. Implementation has not advanced equally far on all of these, however.

In the defence field, for example, things are moving since the activation of Permanent Structured Cooperation and the creation of the European Defence Fund. Member States must now use these instruments to the full in order to achieve the objective of strategic autonomy that the *Global Strategy* introduced. But the EU has yet to define what strategic autonomy means exactly (as I discussed in [Fighting for Europe](#)): that could be one task for the *Global Strategy 2020*. Which responsibilities is Europe willing to assume as a security and defence actor, alone if necessary? Once our partners as well as our adversaries take that into account in their decision-making, we will have become a true strategic actor.

The current *Global Strategy* also introduced resilience as an objective, for the neighbouring countries of the EU, but it is not clear whether in practice this has made any great difference in the way the EU deals with them. In this area, a thorough assessment of implementation could guide the finetuning, or a degree of reorientation, of policy in the *Global Strategy 2020*.

A theme that is implicit throughout the *Global Strategy* is the return of great power rivalry, aggravated by a sense of the fraying of Europe's alliance with the US, still the most powerful of the great powers. The EU will have to take an explicit decision on its stance, especially with regard to the role of China and the future of the rules-based order. The American position is clear: across party lines, China is seen as an adversary that must be prevented from overtaking the US as the leading power. Washington is increasing the pressure on the EU to follow suit and adopt a more confrontational line.

The *Global Strategy 2020* could enshrine a much more sophisticated strategy of engagement (as I advocate in [1919-2019: How to Make Peace Last?](#)). The EU Member States should unite to maintain their sovereignty against all foreign attempts at subversion, making the EU strong enough to push back against China and other powers where it must, but to cooperate whenever it can, along the lines of the recommendations by the European Commission in its 12 March 2019 communication [EU-China - A Strategic Outlook](#).

CONCLUSION

The impetuosity of Donald Trump often pushes the EU (and other actors) into a reactive mode. At the same time, several governments within the EU willingly subvert EU foreign policy, toning down or blocking EU positions at the behest of foreign powers. Yet all of these governments are fully aware that their countries need the EU at the same time, for economic reasons, but also in specific areas of foreign, security and defence policy. A strategic review after the May 2019 elections would be a chance to craft a proactive agenda: a package deal, focusing on a small number of priorities, with something in it for every Member State. A strong HR/VP could negotiate that package and forge a mandate for him- or herself.

A good strategy is not a panacea – it is just a starting point. But does anyone think that the EU will do better with a bad strategy, or even without strategy at all?

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