

Bendiek, Annegret; Kempin, Ronja

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Europe's Foreign and Security Policy Adrift

Strengthening the Role of the EU-3

Annegret Bendiek and Ronja Kempin

A lack of political initiative and strategic orientation keeps Europe from securing its position in the world. Meaningful coordination will not come from institutional tinkering but from political vision and will. This lack of political cohesion on European foreign policies can only truly change if the forerunners of European foreign and security policy – Germany, France and the United Kingdom – align their global interests. A realistic alternative to leadership by the EU-3 is not a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU-27. Instead, the alternative would be unilateralism in Europe's foreign and security policy.

In 2003, the split that had opened up within the EU over the war in Iraq provided the impetus for the Union to define its strategic objectives in the European Security Strategy (ESS). However, due to fears of exposing differences in national security and defence policy priorities, a planned ESS revision was put off indefinitely in late 2008. The European Council could only agree on a "Report on the Implementation of the ESS", which extended the scope of the threats to cyber security, climate change and pandemics, and included a broader inventory of tools and resources. NATO updated its Strategic Concept in 2009 because of new geopolitical challenges, political realities and its own mission repositioning; the United States, on its part, undertook a review of its National Security Strategy in 2010. Furthermore, France and the United Kingdom are increasingly turning towards

bilateral or regional cooperation, leaving the CFSP and CSDP (Common Security and Defence Policy) aside. Last but not least, projects that would lead to substantial developments in this policy area – such as the new institutions and solidarity obligations (i.e., Mutual Assistance Clause, Art. 42 (7) TEU and Solidarity Clause Art. 222 TFEU) introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, or the call of the EU's Internal Security Strategy of 2010 to develop collective threat assessment procedures – are left untouched.

Structural problems in the CFSP

In order to take up the much overdue revision of the ESS 2003-2008, the 27 member states continue to have great difficulties in coming to agreement over which crises the Union should take action in, and which

objectives it wishes to achieve with its operative commitments. Institutionalists would recommend revising the ESS by strengthening the implementation of the CFSP via the Brussels-based institutions. The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, shall regularly consult the European Parliament (EP) on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP and CSDP and inform it of how those policies evolve. She shall ensure that the views of the EP are duly taken into consideration. In its report of July 2011, the EP a) calls for enhanced synergy between the Union and the national level, and for coordination to be strengthened between the various institutional players in order to better integrate all the instruments and policies concerned and to deliver a single message from the Union on key political issues; b) stresses the importance to resolve the imbalance between civil and military planning capabilities within the European External Action Service (EEAS) and to increase personnel numbers in the fields of justice, civil administration, customs and mediation; c) asks for strengthening international partnerships for crisis management and to enhance dialogue with other main players in the crisis management arena – for example, the UN, NATO, the African Union and the OSCE, and with the United States, Turkey, Norway and Canada; d) warns against the risk inherent to member states' over-dependence on energy supplies from third countries, as this could compromise the independence of EU external policy; and e) speaks of a new generation of security risks and challenges such as cyber-attacks, social unrest, political insurgency, international criminal networks and economic activity that could be detrimental to rule of law and democratic principles and underlines the need to integrate the external dimension of the European areas of freedom, security and justice into European foreign policy.

Five ways to strengthen the CFSP and CSDP?

The implementation of the five propositions promises to increase the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the CFSP and CSDP significantly. Good ideas, however, do not translate automatically into practice. Additionally, if we take the dissonance among the member states in foreign and security policy into account, it seems clear that a thorough reform of the CFSP and CSDP will not be accomplished without accepting that a community of 27 member states needs political leadership.

The structural problems of European foreign and security policy coordination are relevant in view of all five propositions. For the time being, the CFSP will have to live with its difficult institutional structure. Neither the High Representative nor the EEAS will be able to change this hybrid structure in favour of one that is more supranational. Thus, institutional coherence within this framework cannot be expected. In early 2011, the Arab uprisings have once again revealed that, in essential moments, EU member states are not willing to grant the High Representative the political mandate for taking decisive and proactive action. Large member states in particular have sought to advance their interests outside the EU framework. Whether in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya, individual heads of state and government have pushed ahead without waiting for agreement on a joint EU position or involving Catherine Ashton.

The operational weaknesses of the CSDP have also become apparent anew. An EU military intervention in Libya was never up for serious discussion. Even if there had been the necessary political will to carry out an EU operation, it could never have been accomplished without an autonomous EU Headquarters. More than 10 years into the development of the CSDP, the only viable options for large-scale military operations are those coordinated by NATO or conducted in coalition with the United States. Secondly, reducing the imbalance

between military and civilian crisis management is only possible by agreeing on the meaning of effective multilateralism and by coherently cooperating in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The latter will have to integrate the post-colonial political interests of states such as France and the United Kingdom into the CFSP and CSDP. Prioritising security challenges and discriminating between more and less pressing issues was impossible in the case of the Iraq war as well as during the Russian-Georgian war of August 2008, and it has certainly not become easier after the Libyan crisis. The third proposition – to foster international partnerships for crisis management and transatlantic ties – is closely related. Whilst some member states look for close security relations with the United States and NATO, it is clear that other member states emphasise the autonomous capacity of the EU to meet European security challenges.

Addressing the interconnections between energy security and EU external policy is another problematic issue. France and Germany concentrate on energy security as well as on fostering economic change, and think in terms of long-term contracts, dialogue and consultation. They are generally very hesitant to accept that Russia's security interests may conflict with European security interests. Security interests are thus clearly subordinated to economic interests. The Central and Eastern European camp takes the opposite approach and is mainly interested in security issues. A stronger interconnection between internal and external policies is also problematic. The member states have different cultural and legal traditions and experiences. This not only concerns classic police services, which are organised centrally in some states and federally in others, such as Germany, but it also concerns foreign, domestic and military intelligence services. In Germany the so-called division of authority principle applies: this implies a strict division between data collection through intelligence services on the one hand and inves-

tigations conducted by law enforcement authorities – including the department of public prosecution – on the other. The division of authority is, however, circumvented through increased institutional cooperation between the police and intelligence services, which is specifically demanded by the EU.

Political leadership

Basically, there are three broad options for coping with these structural problems.

Going with the institutional option: This is a display of faith in utilising the elements of time and discourse. Over time, so the argument, the member states will distance themselves from the shadows of the past and develop common perceptions of the security architecture in Europe. In a non-hierarchical community of 27 member states with heterogeneous perceptions of problems and national interests, effective institutions are of crucial importance for fostering dialogue among the member states. In an intergovernmental setting, the solution for problems can never be triggered by institutional structures. Institutions are ultimately only a means to an end. They are there to implement certain policies and derive their reason from this function. But institutions can never replace policy; they are not able to create clear normative foundations on which to build. Due to an absence of political leadership on the one hand and apolitical institutions on the other, the EU continues to lose itself in ad hoc decisions and explanations, sub-regional strategies and in a juxtaposition of CFSP decisions, the ENP and national foreign policies – none of which have proven very constructive.

Flexibility in the CFSP and CSDP: Many see scepticism about an institutional tightening of the CFSP according to the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty as purely about national sovereignty reservations. However, this criticism is too simplistic and fails to take into account the extraordinary success of democratic nations as guarantors of peace.

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SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Telephone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org

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To sacrifice this balance at the altar of supranational vision and in exchange for the collectivisation of the CFSP is rightfully seen by many as too rash, or at least premature. Member states' hesitancy to surrender sovereignty in the sectors of foreign and security policy sheds light on the fact that this is a very sensitive policy area that must be integrated into a democratic constitution and legal framework. As long as European institutions are not able to provide these democratic controls, there are good reasons to justify an intergovernmental approach. The flexibility option is to take the differences in national historical legacies and the resulting problem perceptions as fixed entities. If European policy is the product of national interests only, then it might indeed be time for bilateral cooperation inside (Gent Initiative) but also outside the CFSP and CSDP (France-UK defence cooperation). The problem is that the member states are individually too weak to counter Russian and US interests in Eastern Europe and the rest of the world. They will either have to form a common policy or join the bandwagon of the bigger powers.

Political leadership: A more promising way is to learn from the past and to apply the lessons learnt to today.

One such lesson is that political leadership in a Europe of 27 might be a necessary precondition for overcoming the existing (geo-)political dissonance that hampers significant advances in the CFSP and CSDP. However, such leadership cannot be provided by any single member state alone (not even by France), but only by a group consisting of a limited number of member states. This group should reunite those member states that, on the one hand, have the most prominent foreign, security and defence policy interests, and that, on the other hand, are able to formulate policies that go beyond the usual lowest-common-denominator politics of the EU-27. Other member states should be given the possibility to join in, but simultaneously it is important that they not be allowed to

water down the proposals of the leading group. One approach would be to form a core group similar to the so-called Quad in NATO, which is formed by US, UK, German and French political directors. A political nucleus of concerned states within the EU – France, Germany, the United Kingdom and, perhaps, Poland – should take responsibility for formulating policy proposals for the EU as a whole. Starting with informal but regular meetings among the foreign ministers, such a group could develop over time into a successor of what the Franco-German cooperation was for the development of the common market. If these three major but all too distant players in foreign and security policy manage to align their global interests, a truly European policy can be reached. Therefore, the three must become the engine for a revision of the ESS, as strategic agreement on what the EU shall do in the field of foreign and security policy is the key to any further initiatives, be they political, institutional or focussed on capabilities.

It is true that leadership cannot guarantee that national interests will be reconciled and that a common European security policy will emerge. But a realistic alternative to the leadership by the EU-3 is not a CFSP of the EU-27. Instead, the alternative would be unilateralism in a new and comprehensive European foreign and security policy.