ZEI INSIGHTS

Over a decade after the adoption of the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003, the vision of Europe as a 'soft power', spreading its rule-based paradigm of cooperation around the world, has hardly translated into reality. The opening sentence of the ESS that "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free"[1], seems almost cynical in today's context. Instead of a zone of stability and prosperity, the European Union now faces a wider neighbourhood, marked by failing states and terrorism:

The Middle East has descended into chaos, across the Mediterranean, ungoverned spaces have expanded, enabling criminal and terrorist networks to flourish. In the east, the EU is confronted with a complex and challenging relationship with Russia. Moreover global phenomena like climate change, migration and conflicts, driven by resource scarcity, are shaping the world[2]. Apart from these external factors, the European project is furthermore contested by destructive internal forces that are questioning the European model of pluralistic societies.

In light of these troubling developments, calls to revise Europe's security strategy have increased in recent years. Therefore, the European Council mandated the current High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HP/VP), Federica Mogherini, to review the ESS and prepare a new framework for Europe's common foreign security policy[3]. Following extensive consultations with member states, parliaments and think tanks, the HP/VP presented her "Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy" (EUGS) to EU leaders at the European Council meeting on 28-29 June 2016.

In comparison with its predecessor, the EUGS displays some major modifications. First, the ESS was adopted against the backdrop of the US-led invasion of Iraq, thereby representing first and foremost an attempt to overcome the deep division, both across the Atlantic, and among EU member states on this matter. As the European counter-part to the US National Security Strategy (NSS), released in 2002, the framework was built upon the notion of Europe's 'soft power' and put forward the concept of an 'effective multilateralism'[4].

While not completely abandoning the idea of the transformative power of the EU, the EUGS promotes a more

realistic approach, expressed in the concept of 'principled pragmatism'[5]: Although the document underlines the EU's principles such as advancing peace and prosperity and promoting a rules-based global order, it also stresses that "in this fragile world, soft power is not enough: we must enhance our credibility in security and defense"[6]. Even though, the EUGS does not advocate establishing an EU army, it clearly calls for a stronger defense cooperation:

"The EU needs to be strengthened as a security community. European security and defense efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO"[7].

Furthermore, the EUGS is the first official EU document to identify and formulate the foreign and security interests of the European Union.[8] In light of the threat of terrorism and the geopolitical situation, the strategy is therefore characterised by a strong focus on Europe's internal security. And since internal and external security are inextricably linked, "security at home entails a parallel interest in peace in our neighboring and surrounding regions"[9]. These neighbors and surrounding regions are hereby very broadly defined, "stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa"[10]. While the EUGS identifies regions as critical spaces of governance and calls for supporting cooperative regional orders and organisations worldwide, it also puts emphasis on tailored approaches. The European neighbourhood is therefore no longer perceived as a coherent space.[11]

Hence, the EUGS sets out its priorities for each region, notably the Middle East, Africa and Asia, but also the Arctic region and its relationship with partners across the Atlantic. With regard to Russia, the document postulates a "consistent and united approach", identifying this relationship as being "a key strategic challenge"[12] yet avoiding a clear definition of the country as a partner or opponent.

Whether the implementation of the new global strategy succeeds, is strongly dependent on the question if the EU member states feel a sense of ownership towards the EUGS and will translate its principles into practice. Here the Brexit will have its major impact on the EUGS. The fact that one of the biggest member states has decided to leave the Union, undermines the EU's credibility as well as capacity in the field of foreign policy. While the UK will continue to play its part through NATO or similar arrangements, it will no longer contribute its highly important military, diplomatic and financial resources to the EU's common foreign and security policy[13].

Mrs. Mogherini's statement, that "a fragile world calls for a more confident and responsible European Union"[14], is to the point, yet due to prevailing crises, the EU itself seems more fragile than ever before.

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