

## **[Comment] A High Representative needs a grand strategy**

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EUOBSERVER / COMMENT - While everyone is eagerly awaiting who will be the successor to Javier Solana as High Representative for the European Union's foreign policy, and who will be the first permanent President of the European Council, a more fundamental question is: which foreign policy strategy will they actually pursue?

In its 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), the EU has a grand strategy, embracing all foreign policy instruments and resources at the disposal of the EU and the member states, but a partial one. The ESS tells us how to do things – in a preventive, holistic and multilateral way – but it is much vaguer on what to do: what are the foreign policy priorities of the EU?

The recent debate about the ESS, resulting in a 2008 report about its implementation, failed to answer this question. Offering little in terms of recommendations for the future, the report creates an impression of unfinished business, which the EU can ill afford now that the Lisbon Treaty will change the institutional set-up.

Nato has launched a strategic debate to which an EU contribution is essential, and the EU risks being overshadowed by the much more purposive emerging powers or BRICs. A fully-fledged strategic review is in order to complete the ESS.

The first rule of strategy-making is to know thyself. Which values and interests should our grand strategy safeguard? Europe has a very distinctive social model, combining democracy, the market economy and strong government intervention.

Preserving and strengthening this internal social contract between the EU and its citizens, guaranteeing them security, economic prosperity, political freedom and



Javier Solana's successor will have more powers under the Lisbon Treaty (Photo: The Council of the European Union)

social well-being, is the fundamental objective of the EU, both internally and as a global actor.

The conditions that have to be fulfilled to allow that constitute our vital interests: defence against any military threat; open lines of communication and trade (in physical as well as in cyber space); a secure supply of energy and other vital natural resources; a sustainable environment; manageable migration flows; the maintenance of international law and universally agreed rights; and autonomy of EU decision-making.

To safeguard these interests, the EU must be a power, that is a strategic actor that consciously and purposely defines long-term objectives, actively pursues these, and acquires the necessary means to that end.

Which kind of power the EU chooses to be, is also conditioned by the international environment. Marked by existential interdependence between an increased number of global powers, that environment is very challenging, but at the same time presents the EU with an opportunity to pursue a distinctive grand strategy.

In the absence of enemies and in view of the need for cooperation to tackle global challenges, the best way of defending our interests, in order to defend our model and values, is precisely to spread those values, because increasing the access of citizens worldwide to security, prosperity, freedom and well-being directly addresses the underlying causes of threats and challenges.

The EU does not seek to coerce others into adopting it, not even merely to entice them through conditionality, but to convince them of the benefits of our model and values through practical cooperation on concrete issues, on the basis of shared interests and common challenges. Thus the recognition of the universality of our values can be gradually and consensually increased.

### **Unanswered questions**

The approach which the EU has pursued so far is in line with this grand strategy, but practice has revealed a number of unanswered questions. How to avoid the clash between immediate interests and the emphasis on values? How to act vis-à-vis the emerging global powers and integrate them in the multilateral architecture? What to do when prevention fails and the threat or use of force is required?

The answers to these questions will determine the objectives which a complete grand strategy should define in more detail. The following priority areas require the identification of specific EU interests and the definition of concrete objectives, in

order to direct policies and actions:

\* **The Neighbourhood:** What is the desired end-state of the Neighbourhood Policy? Can only democracy create a consensual value-based community and thus safeguard our interests, or will democratisation create such upheaval that our interests would be damaged? Only when our interests and red lines are clear can a true strategic partnership with Russia be pursued.

\* **Enlargement:** A successful instrument so far, further enlargement is determining for relations with Russia and for the geopolitical position of the EU – and cannot proceed therefore without strategic debate.

\* **Regional objectives:** A reluctance to discuss interests and join up the different European presences, from aid and trade to diplomacy, has undermined policies towards Central Asia, the Gulf and Africa. Other regions too, such as Asia, Latin America and the Arctic need a thorough assessment of EU interests to determine whether or not our presence should be stepped up.

\* **Global and institutional objectives:** The EU must sharpen its view about the multilateral architecture, reconciling reform with increased effectiveness of EU representation. That should inform a really strategic use of its strategic partnerships with the BRICs, the existence of which too often seems more important than their content.

\* **Conflict resolution and crisis management:** A white book should define Europe's ambition as a security actor. Regardless of whether in a specific case Europeans deploy under the flag of EU, Nato or the UN: which types of operations must European forces be capable of, which priority regions and scenarios require intervention, and which is the scale of the effort to be devoted to these priorities?

It is not sufficient to have a more complete grand strategy – the EU must then also apply it. That requires an institutional follow-up structure. At the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the new High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission, supported by the [External Action Service](#), should be formally entrusted with the implementation and development of EU strategy.

A grand strategy that translates the values on which the EU's own social model is based into a proactive and constructive foreign policy, aimed at concrete objectives: on that basis, with the right political leadership, the EU can be a global power.

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