

The weight of the world is moving <sup>[1]</sup><sub>SEP</sub> east, and Europe has not been at the centre for years now. In this context, Member States alone cannot compete with large emerging powers. There is only one way for European countries to participate in global decision-making: together. This need for greater integration in foreign policy is enhanced by the major risks which arise along all of the Union's borders. We must create foreign policy strategies tailored to each different scenario, and which involve all Member States, leaving aside the particular interests of each of them.

## THE COMPLEXITY AND NECESSITY OF A EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY

The European Union is still the world's first economic and trade power, despite the fact that European nations have been hard hit by the recent recession while other countries have experienced rapid growth. However, these years of economic crisis have made us concentrate our efforts on the EU's internal problems, with the consequent loss of clout in international affairs. We must return to the front line.

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The European Union's external actions convey its way of understanding the world, freedom, personal rights, and its idea of justice. The common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is directly related to European values: human rights, the rule of law, international law, and effective multilateralism. However, the CFSP is also important at the internal level, as it facilitates cooperation among member states and creates more opportunities for inter-member consensus and compromise. The EU, like all institutions, is defined by its actions.

European foreign policy cannot continue to be a mere declaration of intent, a matter of secondary importance for which its member states are unwilling to relinquish one iota of their sovereignty. We must decide where we want to go, what role we want to play in international affairs, and how to achieve those goals. But we also need to address something even more basic: we must agree on a definition of our common interests as a European Union.

When analysing European foreign policy from both the institutional and operational perspectives, we have to consider the characteristics of the present moment and the forecast for the future. Many of today's security risks, such as cybercrime or transnational terrorism, are global and cannot be dealt with fully or effectively from a position of national sovereignty.

The scenario has changed substantially since the early days of the European Union. Many countries that have emerged in recent years already surpass the EU states in population, size, and economic growth. All of them want to participate in global decision-making processes and influence the course of world events. In this new context, European countries have to understand that, in order to be an international actor, the EU must act in unison and speak with one voice. If each member state acts individually, Europe will find itself relegated to the role of mere spectator in the arena of major world events, with neither the capacity nor the power to influence their outcome.

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Unfortunately, the task of materializing European foreign policy has proved to be quite complicated. The EU member states have very different historical backgrounds, and consequently their understanding of foreign policy varies widely. Geographical location is undoubtedly a key factor in defining the interests and agenda of each country, as are cultural and linguistic ties. Some European states are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, while others are more interested in handling their border problems. Getting so many different voices to sing the same tune is a task that requires a great deal of finesse as well as a strong commitment from each member.

The channels and structures for developing European foreign policy have evolved since the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty, and the process is still underway. We have already made great strides, especially since the signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, which expanded the mandate of the High Representative and the European Exterior Action Service, charged with representing the EU abroad. Nevertheless, we must continue working to achieve greater integration and a clearer sense of direction.

## CURRENT CHALLENGES IN FOREIGN POLICY

At this point in time, international issues largely dominate the European political scene. Many of the world's most volatile and troubled regions lie just across Europe's borders, and this proximity increases our responsibility to design and implement solutions.

### Challenges in the East

On the EU's eastern border, in Ukraine, a conflict broke out a little over one year ago that has substantially complicated relations with Russia, reviving dynamics we assumed had been extinguished at the end of the Cold War. The EU has maintained relations with Ukraine since it became an independent state in 1991. Later, in 2007, the EU and Ukraine began negotiations on the Association Agreement, a free trade treaty with a few political ramifications. However, ratification of the agreement was postponed after the case of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko led to a diplomatic dispute.

In 2013, when everything was finally ready for the agreement to be signed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, President Yanukovich refused to ratify the treaty. Instead, he accepted the Russian counteroffer to buy eleven billion euros' worth of Ukrainian bonds and substantially lower the price of gas exports to Ukraine. From that moment on, protests by citizens and the pro-European opposition against the Yanukovich government and

its alignment with Moscow grew more frequent and intense. The diplomatic and economic crisis led to an escalation of violence and tension between pro-Russian and pro-European factions, with notorious consequences in Crimea and the eastern regions of Ukraine.

After the Crimean referendum and declaration of independence, in March 2014 President Putin signed a treaty confirming the peninsula's annexation to the Russian Federation and acknowledging that Crimea had always been a part of Russia. A few months later, the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk proclaimed themselves independent republics, a decision which, according to the Kremlin, had to be respected.

The Russian government's actions during these events amounted to a violation of international law, to which the European Union and others have responded with sanctions. We cannot overlook the fact that, since 1991, when Ukraine declared its independence from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Russia has acknowledged the country's territorial integrity in several international treaties.

Firstly, Moscow's decision to challenge Ukrainian sovereignty over the Crimean Peninsula and the eastern region of Donbas represented a breach of the security order established by consensus in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975. In this agreement, which planted the seed of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the participating states committed to respect the inviolability of frontiers, the territorial integrity of states, and non-intervention in internal affairs, among other principles.

Furthermore, in the Budapest Memorandum (1994), the United States, the United Kingdom, and Russia specifically agreed to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine, and in exchange Kiev gave up its nuclear weapons. For its part, the European Union has always desired to maintain good relations with Ukraine, though ideally without straining EU-Russian relations or being forced to choose between Russia and Ukraine as a trade, security, or other type of partner.

Russia's failure to honour the commitments made when it signed these agreements must be analysed in the context of a specific juncture in Moscow's history. For some time, the Kremlin has been overt in its attempts to maintain very close ties to former Soviet bloc countries, owing to a perception of the United States and the European Union as its main competitors who are striving to draw the USSR's former members closer to themselves. Since the second NATO expansion into Eastern Europe, rapprochement between certain countries and the European Union has been interpreted as a threat to Moscow's spheres of influence, with the potential to lessen its influence in the international arena. Russia has proved, as it already did in Georgia in 2008, that it is prepared to use force and ignore its contractual obligations.

After nearly a year of fighting, in February 2015, Germany, France, Ukraine, and Russia signed the Minsk II Agreement. From a military standpoint, the agreement basically entails a ceasefire and the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Politically, it calls for a constitutional reform to give the provinces of eastern Ukraine greater autonomy. At the end of the process, the central government in Kiev will once again have full control over the Ukrainian-Russian border, currently in the hands of the rebels.

For months, a ceasefire has been in effect in the conflict zone, albeit with frequent accusations of truce violations on both sides. Although it seems that Moscow, currently plagued by serious economic troubles, has no intention of resuming military action, it is not yet clear whether it is willing to negotiate. We will have to wait and see how events unfold in the coming months, once the local elections in Ukraine have been held. These are scheduled to take place across the country except in the eastern territories controlled by pro-Russian separatists, who have called their own independent elections in violation of the Minsk II terms.

Given the tremendous magnitude of the dispute with Russia, resolving the situation needs to be a priority on the European agenda. It is worrying that countries which are neighbours of both the EU and Russia believe they must choose between strengthening ties with Europe and being loyal to Moscow. The EU is set to review the sanctions regime against Russia in January 2016, at which point the measures will almost certainly be renewed unless Moscow's position changes substantially.

## Challenges in the South

Europe is affected, to a large extent, by political instability in North Africa and the Middle East given their geographical proximity. For many years, the United States has had the self-appointed mission of ensuring security in the Middle East, motivated by the need to protect its own interests there, but America's declining fuel dependency and the shift in its foreign policy towards Asia has altered the nature of US involvement in the region. Meanwhile, Europe's heavy reliance on fuel imports and the security risks posed by instability make EU involvement an inevitable necessity.

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The number of people seeking asylum in other countries is growing exponentially, surpassing the figures recorded during World War II

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The spread of war and violence across the region is creating a major humanitarian crisis. The number of people seeking asylum in other countries is growing exponentially, surpassing the figures recorded during World War II. At present, there are more than four million refugees from Syria alone, according to data supplied by the UN Refugee Agency. Although the majority seek asylum in neighbouring countries and remain in the region, every day many of them risk their lives to reach Europe. This situation represents a major challenge for European nations. We must be quick in our humanitarian response and honour our legal obligation to give asylum to those fleeing from persecution. This dire emergency should also spur us to step up our involvement in the search for solutions to the conflicts that have forced so many to seek refuge in Europe.

Regional troubles have intensified particularly since 2011, in the wake of the riots popularly known as the "Arab Spring". Unfortunately, these uprisings—a product of social tensions caused by the difficult economic situation and the people's widespread frustration with the socio-political scenario in their countries—have not had the hoped-for results and, in some cases, have actually degenerated into terrible conflicts.

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The rise of the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda factions have made the situation even more dramatic for Syrian civilians

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In Libya, the nation has been in a state of chaotic upheaval since Gaddafi's death, with immediate consequences for other Mediterranean countries. The growing division of the country, which culminated in the creation of two governments and allowed Islamic State militias to gain footholds in parts of eastern Libya (such as the city of Derna), makes it even harder to maintain security as the country is assailed by myriad internal and external challenges. In addition to terrorism, the repercussions of the Libyan conflict for migratory pressure and the possibility that it may spread to the rest of this already debilitated region pose real threats to Europe. In fact, some are already saying that Libya is poised to become the "Mediterranean's Somalia".

In the early days after the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, in 2011, it looked like Egypt was on the verge of a transition to democracy. In the 2012 presidential elections the Muslim Brotherhood, led by Mohamed Morsi, was voted into power, albeit with a very slim majority and a highly polarized electorate. With Morsi as president, the country had to face the serious economic troubles that had plagued it for years and the new administration's

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In Yemen, the instability ushered in by the January 2011 protests was compounded in early 2015 by the uprising of the Houthis, an insurgent Shiite group, which managed to seize control of the nation's capital. This clash has once again evidenced the rift between Shiite and Sunni Muslims, a determining factor of many other conflicts in the region, and the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia as the respective leaders of these factions.

There are several causes underlying the dynamics of confrontation in the region, but one is fundamental for understanding the current situation: the antagonism between Sunni and Shiite Muslims. The division between these branches of Islam is, of course, religious, but it also has strong geopolitical implications: Iran, with a Shiite majority, and Saudi Arabia, where the majority are Sunni Muslims, have been vying for supremacy in the region for years. This tension is at the root of many ongoing conflicts.

In Syria, the civil war still raging between the regime of Bashar al-Assad and rebel forces has already caused more than 200,000 deaths and the forcible displacement of over twelve million people (both within Syria and to other countries). This means that, of the total Syrian population at the start of the conflict, over half has been displaced. Many of the people forced to flee from their homes by the threat of persecution and lack of protection take refuge in neighbouring countries such as Turkey, Lebanon, or Jordan, which are suffering the consequences of a massive refugee influx—a phenomenon we are also seeing now on Europe's borders. The radicalization of the rebels opposed to Al-Assad, the involvement of so many foreign powers in the conflict in one way or another, and the terrifying rise of extremist terrorism all represent enormous obstacles on the road to peace.

Al-Assad's regime has been backed by Russia and Iran from the outset, while the Sunni opposition has garnered the support of Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar. Meanwhile, the rest of the international community has been hesitant and reluctant to get involved, influenced by the memory of past

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In addition to the risks posed to Europe by conflicts and disputes along its borders, we must consider other challenges of a global nature. As stated earlier, today we live in a global world where borders are increasingly permeable, and many of the security threats we now face are global as well. Security issues such as the proliferation of nuclear weapons, organized crime, arms and human trafficking, inequality, and pandemics affect us all.

Cyber risks are one of the most obvious global threats today. Information and communication technologies have become a fundamental part of daily

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ports. The two routes will form a network linking Asia and Europe. The project's investments will affect approximately 60 countries, and one of the principal ports of call will be that of Piraeus, in Greece. This plan to improve connectivity, which will consolidate China as the EU's number-one trade partner, confirms the Chinese government's determination to prioritize Euro-Asian relations.

We need to focus our attention on the evolution of emerging powers like China, India, and Brazil

In this new scenario, it is crucial that the EU continue to strengthen international and trade ties with the Asian continent. An example of success in this area is the free trade agreement signed with Vietnam in August 2015. However, although Asia is often analysed primarily from an economic standpoint, there are other aspects of Euro-Asian relations worth noting.

For example, in an Asian continent that has achieved economic but not political integration, the EU can offer the benefit of its extensive experience in regional integration, something that would contribute decisively to promoting long-term stability in the region.

While acknowledging the limitations and shortcomings of the European project, a greater degree of EU involvement in Asia's existing regional integration structures—such as ASEAN or the ASEAN Regional Forum, the only security dialogue forum in the Asia-Pacific in which the EU has its own seat—would be highly beneficial.

## THE ROAD AHEAD

The EU must offer an appropriate response to the magnitude of the challenges it faces and what is expected of it in the world. Knowing this, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Federica Mogherini, has been mandated to prepare a new global strategy on foreign policy, with the perspective and focus needed to promote EU external action and increase its effectiveness. Approval of this policy, slated for June 2016, will be a major step forward for the EU and hopefully will address the most pressing needs in this area.

### The EU's Diplomatic Work

One of the ways in which the EU can implement its foreign policy quite successfully is through diplomacy. The EU is regarded by many as an experienced mediator in settling numerous conflicts, and it is precisely in the role of negotiator that it manages to achieve many of its goals.

The nuclear deal with Iran, signed this past July, is a good example of what the EU can accomplish thanks to its diplomatic skills. It was the EU who initiated negotiations with Iran in 2003, and at the time we Europeans were the only ones involved in the talks. Later on, the EU joined forces with the permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany to form a group called the E3/EU+3. The agreement recently signed with Iran regarding its nuclear programme has opened a window of opportunity for bringing greater stability to the Middle East. Teheran's ties with the Iraqi government, the Al-Assad regime in Syria, the Houthis in Yemen, and Hezbollah in Lebanon make it a key player in regional politics.

As for our relations with Russia, it is very important that we attempt to strengthen ties and recover the mutual trust that has been lacking since the beginning of the Ukraine dispute. However, the EU must firmly insist on the observance of international law; this has to be our red line. The harmonious coexistence of Europe and Russia in the Euro-Asia region is undoubtedly a very positive thing for both countries. However, it will undeniably take some time for the tensions created by this conflict to die down so that we can rebuild a climate of mutual trust.

Another of the EU's objectives must be to promote stability and democracy in the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans. It would be advisable for the EU to pay special attention to voices outside government channels, in order to gain a better understanding of each society's needs. Civil society demands, with growing insistence, better governance and more respect for civil rights.

In the Middle East, the EU cannot be expected to solve the conflicts, but it can use diplomacy to become a key facilitator in orchestrating regional agreements. Bringing Sunni and Shiite Muslims together is the key to peace in the Middle East, and promoting this should be the goal of all other actors with an interest in ensuring the region's stability. Peace cannot be achieved with a solution imposed by outsiders; this would only plant the seed of a new and perhaps even deadlier conflict in an area whose population has already been devastated by too many years of war. It is therefore essential that the EU maintains a constant dialogue with regional powers like Iran and Turkey.



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Members of the Eurocorps service hold the European flag in front of the Parli

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The European Union has another major task ahead of it: contributing to the improvement of governance in countries where state institutions do not operate efficiently. Helping to build more capable and effective government bodies is the best way to wrest power away from terrorist groups and organized crime and place it back in the hands of the state, where it belongs. In fact, in the countries of the Sahel this seems to be the only viable way of achieving the stability that is so necessary for their inhabitants and security.

## European Neighbourhood Policy

One of the instruments through which the EU develops its foreign relations is the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Designed to articulate relations with our closest neighbours, this policy currently has two subdivisions: one for the countries of Eastern Europe, and one for the southern states. The EU does, in fact, have one sphere of action that takes precedence above all others—namely, its borders—and relations with neighbouring countries must therefore be handled with special care.

However, grouping many different countries together under the concept of southern or eastern neighbourhood has proved inefficient because each neighbouring state evolves at a different pace. Tunisia's current situation is not comparable to Egypt's. And other countries, such as Turkey, though not really neighbours in a technical sense, are key pieces for addressing many current problems. It is a mistake to believe that we can apply a single policy, almost automatically, to very different countries. Having a separate policy for each nation may be more complicated, but it is far more efficient.

As the preparatory reports on the new European foreign policy accurately point out, EU external action needs to be more flexible to increase the effectiveness of all its measures. Adopting an approach to other countries that is more political, via diplomatic channels, and less bureaucratic and regimented is a more effective way of increasing the EU's commitment to improving living conditions, democratization, and economic and social progress.

## Security

The European Union has a responsibility to create the necessary conditions (political, social, etc.) for averting war. We cannot hope to combat the many threats to European and global security unless we work to perfect a common security policy.

In terms of military might, the individual relevance of European countries is waning, and conflicts on our borders underscore the need to be prepared for any contingency. Over the past several years, the economic recession in Europe has caused governments to be less concerned with international security issues and apply budget cuts in the area of defence.

Yet during those same years, as mentioned above, the problems facing Europe have multiplied, and they are too great for any one country to solve on its own. In fact, in this global, multi-polar world, no nation can guarantee its own safety without assistance. The distinction between internal and external security is also increasingly blurred, with two obvious implications: security and defence policy must now be perfectly aligned with foreign policy; and security risks should be viewed as something common to all member states, for even those with conflict-free borders have to consider the impact of security threats on their territory.

The EU's security and defence policy is one of the most difficult tools to implement in the context of the European project. In matters of defence, differences between the domestic interests of member states have been even more pronounced than in foreign policy. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe are more concerned about the insecurity that Russian policies might create, while southern members tend to prioritize the risks derived from conflicts in the Middle East and the challenge of mass migration in the Mediterranean.

The European Security Strategy, the framework that includes the common security and defence policy (CSDP), was approved in 2003. The world has changed substantially since then, and European strategy must take into account the current scenario. In December 2013, the European Council, aware of the need to reconsider European security and defence strategies in light of new threats, placed the CSDP at the centre of the debate. Since then, several security policies have been adopted on specific issues to serve as a guideline for the actions of member states.

However, now that the security strategy is being revised, we must take the opportunity to move decisively towards greater integration. The effectiveness of the EU's security strategy, which must go hand-in-hand with its foreign policy strategy, depends on the cooperation and real commitment of its member states.

Defence budgets need to be increased, but above all they need to be used more wisely, minimizing inefficiency. Better coordination among members will increase our global presence and capabilities, not by spending more but by optimizing resources. We must push for integration on security matters at the European level, with a strong emphasis on R&D+i, while reinforcing the role of the European Defence Agency. Another fundamental task is to ensure that the defence industry market works properly, making it more open and transparent to promote the beneficial exchange of technology and greater synergy between the civilian and military sectors.

Additionally, the EU needs to take the lead in designing global cybersecurity strategies. Over the last several years, many international, regional, and technical institutions have addressed the issue of security in cyberspace, including the United Nations, the Council of Europe, the G20, the G8, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). However, there is no consensus on what the guiding principles of global cyber security governance should be. The EU must actively participate in the process of drafting a basic regulatory framework, similar to that which the international community has adopted on matters of global health or weapons proliferation. We need to contribute to the debate and shape the agreements that are eventually reached; we cannot afford to fall behind in the area where all of the world's economic activities are concentrated today. Let us not forget that, by the year 2020, two-thirds of the global population will be connected to the internet.

## CONCLUSION: OUR ROLE ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE

A political union like the EU cannot allow its member states to face the challenges on their respective borders alone. In order to forge a foreign policy that is truly common to all members, we must work together to identify the risks we face and combine our individual perspectives to envision possible solutions and the EU's potential role in implementing them.



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The best contribution that the EU can make to world peace is to stay united and prevent new conflicts in Europe. However, it cannot stop there. The EU, like every other global actor, has a great responsibility to act in the face of current problems and conflicts, and there are many important ways in which it can contribute to the design of conflict resolution mechanisms and multilateral institutions.

It goes without saying that the countries which make up the European Union have made great efforts to reconcile their diverse individual identities and seek common interests, and that experience can be very helpful in many present-day scenarios. They have also created institutions and mechanisms for integration which, though imperfect, have proved to be successful.

The multi-polar world we live in needs multilateral institutions to address global threats—threats that can never be neutralized if each nation acts independently. Today's problems will be solved, not by confrontation and brute force, but through dialogue and consensus. The EU's past experience in this area is an invaluable resource.

Moreover, exterior action is a necessary tool that allows the EU to defend European interests. We cannot remain on the sidelines as mere spectators in such a rapidly changing world; we must act, because those changes also affect us. If we can agree on what the EU's stance should be towards the rest of the world, our responses will be swifter and work towards achieving a common goal.

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