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# Values and Interests at the Heart of European Union Foreign Policy

Sven Biscop

Both when designing and when analysing foreign policy, the first question is: Whose foreign policy? This essay seeks to understand what the foreign policy of the European Union (EU) is, without any attempt to hide what the author feels it ought to be. It is in equal measure analysis and design (or, some might say, wishful thinking). The starting point therefore must be: Which EU are we talking about? What is Europe?

In his 2005 magnum opus *Postwar*, British historian Tony Judt answered that question very concisely: the heart of Europe is the European social model. Through a combination of democracy, capitalism and government intervention at the national and European levels, Europeans have constructed a model of society distinguished by its egalitarian aspiration. And the model really works: Europe is the most equal continent on the planet, providing the greatest security, freedom, and prosperity (the three core public goods to which every citizen is entitled) to the greatest number of people in the world. Looking at each one of these in turn:

1. Security: every citizen has to be kept free from harm.
2. Freedom: every citizen needs to participate in democratic decision-making, has to have his human rights respected, and has to be equally treated before the law.
3. And prosperity: every citizen has a right to a fair share of the wealth that society produces; not an equal share, but a just one.

The model does not of course work perfectly well, and there are many differences in how the social model is organised between one Member State and another. But the aspiration is real and shared. In 2009, the Member States even codified it in the Lisbon Treaty, which amended Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union and added equality and solidarity to the list of values upon which the EU is based:

*“The Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member States in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women prevail”.*

Because they constitute an integrated economy with a distinctive social model, Member States also have shared interests. Values and interests are not in contradiction: one’s values determine which kind of society one wants to build and preserve, which in turn determines which conditions need to be fulfilled for that to be possible: one’s vital interests. One’s values further determine which types of instruments one can legitimately use to achieve those ends. Thus the EU need not be timid in defending the following vital interests, but must – as much as possible – do so in such a way that it does not harm the legitimate interests of others:

1. Preventing direct military threats against Europe’s territory from materialising: such threats may appear unlikely today, but that does not mean this will always be the case.
2. Keeping all lines of interaction with the world open, notably sea lanes and cyberspace: as a global trade power, any interruption of the global marketplace immediately damages the European economy.
3. Assuring the supply of energy and other natural resources that society and the economy need.
4. Managing migration in an ethically acceptable way: on the one hand migration is necessary in order to maintain a viable work force, yet on the other hand the social model might not be able to cope with a surplus of migrants.
5. Mitigating the impact of climate change in order to limit its multiplier effect on security threats and, of course, to save the planet.
6. Upholding the core of international law, notably the interdiction of the use of force in the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the more the rules are respected, the better it is for international stability.
7. Preserving the autonomy of decision-making by preventing undue dependence on any foreign power: Europe should make its own decisions and not have decisions taken for it in Moscow, Beijing or Washington.

What many have forgotten is that the social model that depends on the safeguarding of these vital interests was, and remains, an inherent part of the EU project. Everybody is familiar with the founding myth of the EU: after the end of the Second World War, in order to prevent that another world war would start in Europe, the founding fathers launched upon a path of integration between states that made war between them a practical impossibility. But: this is only half of the story. At the same time the countries of (western) Europe also made a quantum leap in the establishment of the comprehensive

welfare state. This happened for a reason: they had learned in the 1930s that without the social buffer of the welfare state, democracy could not cope with severe economic crisis and its resulting political upheaval. For the founding fathers, the social model was thus an inherent part of their peace project. It is not a luxury, nice to have when things are going well but easily discarded when things are going badly; on the contrary, it is precisely in times of crisis that one has to invest in it. At the time, building the welfare state was of course a national undertaking. Today, there is a single market and, for most Member States, a currency union, a banking union, and common budgetary rules enforced by the European Commission; maintaining the social model increasingly requires that some aspects of it at least be incorporated into this common EU system of governance.

The strength of EU foreign policy is that it takes this very same egalitarian aspiration and turns it into a positive project for Europe's relations with the world. "A secure Europe in a better world" is the subtitle of the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (ESS), the first grand strategy for EU foreign and security policy adopted by the Heads of State and Government. That says it all: the aim of EU foreign policy is to secure Europe; the best way of doing that is to, so to speak, make the world a better place. The core of this strategy is neatly captured in just two sentences in the ESS:

*"The best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order".*

In other words, the key to everyone's security is an international order of effective states that provide for the security, freedom and prosperity of their own citizens. Only where governments treat their citizens equally are lasting peace and stability possible. Where governments do not provide for their citizens however, tensions will arise; instability, repression and conflict will follow. Citizens will eventually revolt, and regimes will either implode, relatively peacefully (think of the Soviet Union in 1991 or Tunisia in 2011), or explode, with a lot of violence (as is happening all around Europe today). Therefore, put less diplomatically: the more the rest of the world becomes like Europe, the better for everybody. The better for Europe, for there will be less ground for the influx of mass migration, less interruption of trade, and less risk of conflict spilling over to its territory. But the better also for citizens in the rest of the world, for they will enjoy more security, freedom and prosperity.

That does not mean however that the EU should simply try to export its own social model in all its intricate detail to the rest of the world. Not only would that be all too paternalistic, it just would not work. Circumstances around the world are too different for a one-size-fits-all model. What Europe should try to promote is the egalitarian aspiration, the sense that government is responsible for the *res publica* – and not just for the wellbeing of the ruling elite. Europeans should abandon the idea that they know better how to govern other countries than the citizens of those countries themselves, but they can legitimately advertise the results that they have achieved in Europe. There are many ways of achieving the same result, and it is the result, as well as the sincere commitment to at least attempt it,

that counts. In many countries that is what citizens are already demanding, loud and clear. The brave people who went out into the streets in Tunisia in 2011, whose actions would bring down the authoritarian regime of Ben Ali and trigger the Arab Spring, demonstrated because they wanted exactly this: a government that protects their security, respects their human rights, gives them a say in decision-making, and tries to make the economy work for everybody. These Tunisian demonstrators were not different from Belgian workers striking, and getting shot at, for the right to vote in the 1880s, Polish trade unionists resisting dictatorship in the 1980s, or Chinese citizens denouncing corruption today.

In the end, for EU foreign policy to embody the same values which its domestic social model is based upon is a moral duty in itself. No polity can be called truly democratic unless it is democratic in all of its actions. One could never imagine that for the sake of expediency the EU would suspend the rule of law or respect for human rights when dealing with the Common Agricultural Policy or regulation of the telecommunications sector. It should be as unimaginable to do so in foreign and security policy. If the EU gives up on its own values, its foreign policy would perpetuate the very challenges that it tries to address: war, authoritarianism, and inequality. The more Europe is perceived to put into practice the values it professes, not just in its foreign policy but even more so domestically, the more legitimacy it gains with citizens of other countries. The biggest source of Europe's influence is neither its soldiers nor even its trade, but the success of the way it does things internally.

The implication for the EU is evident: a foreign policy founded on promoting the results of its social model cannot be credible if it no longer adheres to it itself. Unfortunately this is exactly what the EU and several Member States began to do when the financial and economic crisis hit Europe. That the crisis did not bode well for EU foreign policy was self-evident. In times of austerity there simply is less money available for foreign policy, and as the EU Heads of State and Government devoted summit after summit to the crisis, foreign policy inevitably fell to the wayside. Faced with the fact that the Eurozone as it existed did not work, Member States could do one of two things: they could abandon the Euro, or they could save it by deepening financial and economic integration. The fundamental choice for the latter option has been made, and the trend therefore remains ever closer union. But the painful and drawn-out decision-making process created the image of a weak Union, paralysed by dissent and unable to take resolute action. Still today, the EU is struggling to find a just answer to the crisis in Greece. Could anyone imagine, in the United States, that kicking a state out of the federation would be seriously considered? Yet this is what many in the EU seem to be steering towards when it comes to Greece. All of this inevitably undermines the credibility of any foreign policy initiative which the EU might want to undertake.

But the Eurozone crisis also affected EU foreign policy on a less evident but actually much more fundamental level, because the way in which it was initially addressed was at odds with the values underpinning the EU. How to save the Euro was presented as a technocratic issue, devoid of political or ideological choices. The medicine was known, it was just a matter of convincing the unwilling patient to swallow it. Certainly the purpose could not be doubted: the Euro had to be saved. But not as

an end in itself. The Euro is a political project, of course, and a symbol of European integration, but first and foremost it is a means to enhance the security, freedom and prosperity of European citizens. If the Euro were to be saved in such a manner that the prosperity and equality of European citizens were destroyed, the end result would be extremely dangerous for the European project as such, for citizens would no longer feel committed to the Union and the governments that did not respect its core egalitarian aspiration. Great internal instability would be the result – hardly a base for decisive external action. Many citizens have already lost faith in the EU. Even though the European Commission under its President Jean-Claude Juncker has now charted a different course, accepting that jobs and growth are more likely to save the Union than austerity, restoring trust in the EU will be a task of many years.

The world will not stand still until the EU has found its bearing again, however. The turmoil in Europe's neighbourhood, rising tensions in a multipolar world, and the shift in the focus of US strategy ensuing from its pivot to Asia more than merit the drafting of a new strategy for EU foreign policy, replacing the 2003 ESS. At the June 2015 meeting of the European Council, the Heads of State and Government gave a mandate to the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, to draft an EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy by June 2016. As the EU is working out which kind of Union it wants to be for its own citizens, so it must work out which kind of power it wants to be in world politics.

The existing ESS outlines an agenda for EU foreign policy that is not only ambitious, but that in political science terms makes the EU a revolutionary power: a power that seeks to change the existing order. To state, as the ESS does, that "the quality of international society depends on the quality of the governments that are its foundation" is to say in couched yet clear enough terms that the EU does not think that said quality is currently assured. To add that "the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states" is a call for regime-change across the globe, for there are, alas, far too few such states. The EU would of course like to see this happen gradually and smoothly, not by force of arms, but through "positive conditionality": governments being offered greater access to the European market (for people, goods, services and capital) for every step they take towards more equal provision of security, freedom and prosperity for their citizens.

Yet in practice the EU more often behaves as a status quo power, happy with things as they are. The clearest symptom of this is Europe's addiction to partnership as a way of conducting international relations. It seems as if almost every country in the world has a formal partnership of some kind or other with the EU. In reality partnership cannot be the beginning of a diplomatic relationship, but is its desired end-state. For effective partnership is only possible if there is sufficient consensus on foreign policy objectives and on what are acceptable ways of achieving them, so as to enable systematic consultation and regular joint action. The EU has ten high-profile "strategic partnerships": with NATO allies, the United States and Canada; with the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa); with Japan, Mexico and, most recently, South Korea. But even with many of these strategic partners the afore-referred degree of consensus does not exist. Rather

than stimulating its “partners” to change for the better (for why would they as they are on the list of the “good guys” already) the EU itself has become tainted by associating too uncritically with all kinds of unsavoury regimes. That is the consequence of something that happens rather too often in the EU: after a while it begins to mistake an aspirational notion in one of its policies for reality. Thus, the EU ended up believing that all those which it had dubbed partners really were partners. Europe’s southern neighbourhood is a case in point. The EU gave up on its reform agenda and on the promotion of the egalitarian aspiration in favour of a status quo policy, working with every dictator that seemed to meet its concerns over terrorism, migration and energy supply. And then came the Arab Spring that toppled Europe’s “partners” in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt... The eastern neighbourhood presents a mirror image: in the Ukraine the EU pushed too far too fast, ignoring that the country was not ready for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and that its other neighbour, Russia, might have a less benign reading of EU intentions. The resulting image is one of a blundering and reactive EU.

The easiest way to overcome this problem of double standards would be to simply give up on the lofty rhetoric and pursue a status quo strategy in words as well as in deeds. That however is not an option for the EU because, as seen above, the notion that “the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states” remains absolutely true and is but the reflection of the EU project itself. If EU foreign policy abandons its distinctiveness, this would be a disavowal of its own values – Europe would simply no longer be Europe. Europe would be but one international actor among others, and a weak one at that: an EU without its distinctive egalitarian project would just be like the US, but without the latter’s armed strength. The EU cannot and should not give up on its “revolutionary” agenda, but instead find better ways of achieving it.

A middle path has, thus, to be found – neither dreamy idealism nor unprincipled pragmatism. The revolutionary agenda has proved to be far too optimistic. If change does not emerge organically from within a country, it cannot be engineered from the outside. All attempts to do so have ended in disaster, as seen in Iraq and also Afghanistan. In such circumstances playing a reforming role is extremely difficult. However, a pure status quo policy, just working with the powers that be, has also proven harmful to Europe’s interests. Regimes that do not provide for the security, freedom and prosperity of their citizens are inherently unstable and will eventually implode or explode – one cannot, therefore, count on long-term cooperation. When internally driven change does occur, however, Europe has to be on the right side of history or it will find itself without legitimacy. An external actor can attempt to play a moderating role, aiming to curb excesses by exerting pressure via diplomatic channels, and in the case of serious threats to EU interests or serious human rights violations, applying sanctions. Military intervention under the principle of the Responsibility to Protect is the ultimate emergency break in case of the gravest violations (genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity), which only the Security Council can trigger. But these are emergency measures and not a basis for day-to-day policy.

The middle path could be an active strategy of pragmatic idealism. To remain consistent with itself, Europe has to adhere to the long-term overall objective of “a world of

well-governed democratic states”, but it must do so in the knowledge that said objective will only be reached through incremental steps, as opposed to great leaps.

In places where, for the time being at least, the situation seems impervious to change Europe should at least not do anything that puts even more obstacles in the way of achieving “well-governed democratic states”. In other words, if one doesn’t see what can be done, a good general rule is at the very least to not do anything that clashes with one’s own values. Therefore a pure status quo policy of cooperation with the powers that be is not an option. This does not mean that the EU cannot cooperate with them at all. On the contrary, it should seek to continuously engage all relevant actors in such countries, the opposition and civil society as well as the regime – but the EU cannot cooperate with any regime in ways that strengthen its authoritarian foundations. To put it very bluntly: rendition of terrorist suspects to be “interrogated” by the security services of an autocracy while preaching about human rights is not good for Europe’s credibility. But the EU definitely ought to engage economically: trade and even more so investment leading to job creation are the best ways of positively affecting a society.

When a situation is unfrozen and change does occur it can be for the better or for the worse, but there is, at such a moment, at least a chance of improvement. This is the moment when – building on the legitimacy that a policy of pragmatic idealism ought to have endowed it with – the EU can actively attempt to generate multiplier effects, and to steer change in a direction that is beneficial to its interests. While Europe’s preferred instruments are diplomatic and economic, military intervention is an option if change creates security concerns. A cost-benefit evaluation must determine, on a case-by-case basis, whether European military involvement is called for. If Europe does not intervene, will there be a threat against its vital interests? And what will the humanitarian consequences be for the population of the country itself? If it does intervene, what are the chances of averting the threat and creating the conditions in which change for the better can be achieved and consolidated? And what will be the risk of creating negative effects (such as escalation to other countries), of incurring casualties among European forces and collateral damage?

Trade-offs are inevitable. When choosing to intervene militarily against the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, one cannot do without regional actors in the coalition, even if many of those countries themselves sustain practices (such as decapitating criminals and hanging homosexuals) that are absolutely at odds with the universal values espoused and propagated by the EU. Academics may try to develop elegant strategic concepts, such as this author pertains to do, but unfortunately elegance cannot always be preserved when conducting foreign and security policy. And yet these strategic concepts can help the EU to make decisions, to assess what is important for Europe and what is not, which responses are possible and which are not, and which resources ought to be allocated where. Pragmatic idealism ought to ensure two things: that the EU remains true to universal egalitarian values and thus to itself, and that it plays an active, leading role in the international arena. Sometimes taking the reins will lead to failure, but oftentimes it will lead to success – passively accepting the course of events may not do the former, but it will also never do the latter.





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## The Impact of the Risk Perception Society on Sovereignty, Security and Development in the Global South

Bill Durodié

### New Order

In 1972, at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the prospective head of what was to become the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Maurice F. Strong, proposed a need for '*new concepts of sovereignty*' to tackle global ills. His call coincided with a growing premonition of problems that was beginning to emerge in the West, as also expressed by the influential report of the so-called Club of Rome, '*Limits to Growth*'.

This gloomy cultural mood and the ideas associated with it were, in their turn, undoubtedly shaped by various other factors impacting on Western nations at that time. These included, the ending of gold convertibility and the devaluation of the dollar in 1971 (driven by a faltering US economy combined with the expenditure needed to meet the demands of the Vietnam War), along with various episodes of civil unrest that, from May 1968 onwards, had gripped nations in Europe as well as further afield.

Together with a Cold War that – at the time – was heating up quite considerably, it is unsurprising that a number of thinkers in the West felt a sense of doom and started advocating new ways of organising domestic and international affairs. However these thinkers were then still a minority of the nervous, educated elite and their unease, and the