

Tracking European Commission priority initiatives in 2016 – Number 1

A Global Strategy on foreign and security policy for the EU

SUMMARY

Recognising dramatic changes in the EU's security environment, at the June 2015 European Council, Member States' leaders approved a mandate for the EU High Representative to continue the process of strategic reflection with a view to preparing a global strategy on foreign and security policy, in close cooperation with Member States, to be submitted to the European Council by June 2016.

The strategic reflection about the EU's future Global Strategy is ongoing. The picture emerging from the discussions within the European foreign and security policy community, as well as the partial information provided by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, suggests that the strategy will strive to promote and protect the interests of the EU and its citizens, in particular with regard to their security, prosperity and resilience. It will be structured around a set of assumptions and issues grouped in five priority areas: strengthening global governance, supporting regional architectures, strengthening state and social resilience, rethinking the EU's approach to conflict and crises, and responding to the 'integration choice' of its near neighbours.

In April 2016, the European Parliament is expected to vote in plenary on an own-initiative report, 'The EU in a changing global environment', adopted by the Foreign Affairs Committee, intended as the EP's input to the definition of the Global Strategy.



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EU as a global player: from Solana to Ashton

The story of the EU's role as a global actor is one of constant evolution and adjustment – both to internal changes (e.g. the EU has almost tripled in size since 1993) and external challenges (the Rwandan genocide, break-up of Yugoslavia, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and war in Iraq) – that resulted in several Treaty revisions. But it is also a story of an ambitious and difficult project where the ideal of a coherent and effective foreign and security policy has often been at odds with Member States' national interests. Today, faced with instability in its southern and eastern neighbourhoods, limited effectiveness of global institutions, and new challenges for the rule-based international order, the EU is once again engaged in the process of strategic reflection that will allow it to shape future events more effectively. A new 'EU Global Strategy' is expected by June 2016.

The Solana approach

The existing conceptual framework for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), including what would later become the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), is provided in the [European Security Strategy](#) (ESS) approved by the European Council in December 2003. In light of clear differences between EU Member States over the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the ESS aimed to introduce more coherence into EU foreign and security policy, and provide a common strategic vision for the EU as a whole. Titled '**A Secure Europe in a Better World**', the ESS was the first text to define the EU's security environment, identify key security challenges and subsequent political implications for the EU. Prior to taking over the EU Council Presidency in 2008, French President, Nicolas Sarkozy [signalled](#) the intention to equip the European Union with a bolder security strategy that would progressively affirm its position as 'a first-rank player for peace and security'. Cautious of potential divisions that might emerge in the debate about the EU's new security strategy, in December 2007, Member States [tasked](#) the High Representative, Javier Solana, with examining the implementation of the Strategy and proposing a possible route to improving it. The process ended with adoption of the [Report](#) on the **Implementation of the European Security Strategy** at the European Council held in Brussels on 11 and 12 December 2008. The report concluded that despite some progress, for the EU's full potential to be realised, the Union would need to be still 'more capable, more coherent and more active'.

The Ashton approach

From the beginning, the announcement in 2007 of the review of the European Security Strategy generated great [expectations](#) among the European foreign and security policy community. It is not surprising, therefore, that the adoption of a 'review' document as opposed to a new fully-fledged 'strategy' disappointed. In 2009 already, think-tanks were [suggesting](#) that the Report on the implementation of the ESS should be the start rather than the end of a process. However, the 2009 change in leadership in the EU institutions and the focus on adoption and implementation of the Lisbon Treaty moved the debate on European security strategy to the longer term. Following the [appointment](#) of Catherine Ashton as High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HRVP) – a position strengthened by the Lisbon Treaty – the focus of EU foreign-policy circles was on establishing the EU's own [diplomatic service](#), the European External Action Service.

Ashton did not share the view that the EU needed a new security strategy. She favoured a different approach, with the EU developing **region- and issue-specific strategies**, and

focusing on their subsequent implementation. As a result, during her term the EU adopted several documents of strategic importance, including on the EU's [comprehensive approach](#) to external conflicts and crises (2011), a changing [Neighbourhood](#) (2011), the Strategy for Security and Development in the [Sahel](#) (2011), a Strategic Framework for the [Horn of Africa](#) (2011), the [Cybersecurity](#) Strategy (2013), the [Maritime Security](#) Strategy (2014), and the [Cyber Defence](#) Policy Framework (2014). In advance of the European Council meeting focused on security and defence in December 2013, Ashton presented the [Report](#) on Common Security and Defence Policy in which, for the first time, she promoted the EU's strategic autonomy whereby the EU 'must be able to act decisively through CSDP as a security provider, in partnership when possible but autonomously when necessary, in its neighbourhood, including through direct intervention'.

Towards a new global strategy

The objective of making the EU a stronger global actor through more effective and flexible use of Europe's external-action tools features among ten priority areas listed in the [Political Guidelines](#) set out by the current European Commission President, Jean-Claude Juncker.

The Mogherini approach

Based on the mandate received from the European Council, Federica Mogherini, in her capacity as High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission, engaged in a **two-step process**, [aimed](#) first at the assessment of the EU's global environment (December 2014-June 2015), and second at strategic reflection, with a view to preparing a global strategy on foreign and security policy (June 2015-June 2016). At the European Council in December 2014, the Heads of State or Government [invited](#) the High Representative, in close cooperation with the Commission, and following consultations with the Member States, to assess the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union in the evolving **global environment**. Based on the assessment presented at the June 2015 European Council, Member States [approved](#) a mandate for the HRVP to continue the process of **strategic reflection** with a view to preparing an 'EU global strategy on foreign and security policy' in close cooperation with the Member States. Speaking at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) Annual Conference in October 2015, Mogherini [presented](#) the philosophy guiding the process, which should have a clear sense of direction and well-defined priorities in order to maximise the EU's capacity to 'make a difference'. Later in a speech at the European Defence Agency, she [reiterated](#) that the EU cannot act without a rational strategy and a vision of what it wants to achieve, and how.

Assessment of the global environment: challenges and implications

In June 2015, Mogherini [presented](#) her strategic assessment of the global security environment. The corresponding report, entitled 'The European Union in a changing global environment' – prepared by an interinstitutional group of officials under the Mogherini's leadership – stressed that the European Union has all the means to be an influential global player in future if it acts collectively. Based on the analysis of the current global environment, the [document](#) outlined the most important challenges and opportunities for the EU, and made the case for a strategy to steer the Union's global action and set priorities in a rapidly changing environment. The document identifies three main features of the global environment:

- A more **connected** world, whereby a surge in global connectivity and human mobility challenges traditional approaches to migration, citizenship, development and health, while at the same time facilitating crime, terrorism and trafficking.
- A more **contested** world in which fragile states and ungoverned spaces are expanding, as a result of instability and violence triggered by poverty, lawlessness, corruption and conflict-ridden electoral politics.
- A more **complex** world where power is shifting towards other regional players in the developing world and is increasingly shared between state and non-state actors.

Challenges and opportunities for the EU

The assessment of the evolving environment resulted in identification of broad sets of challenges and opportunities. Firstly, the document calls on the EU to continue support for reforms in the **neighbourhood** (i.e. Western Balkans, Turkey and the Eastern Partners) through integration and association policies. It also identifies the need to address destabilising actions on the EU's borders, while also engaging with Russia 'to restore sustainable European security architecture and address global challenges'. Secondly, the assessment suggests that addressing the root causes of conflict, sharpening EU tools in the internal-external security nexus, and addressing immediate humanitarian crises are necessary in order to cope with challenges in **North Africa and the Middle East**. Thirdly, in order to unlock **Africa's** potential, the document proposes the EU develops 'the right mix of migration and mobility policies', and promotes fair trade and economic cooperation as well as reinforcing cooperation with regional organisations. With regard to the **Atlantic partnership**, the document promotes a 'strong and sound privileged relationship' across the Atlantic, including through bilateral partnerships and inter-regional arrangements with Latin American and Caribbean countries. Finally, the document highlights the positive role that the EU might play in **Asia** as a supporter of regional cooperation and a rules-based approach to conflict management.

Implications

Against that background, the document presented by Mogherini in June 2015 suggested a number of adjustments in the way the EU conducts its foreign and security policy. It stressed that 'an effective response depends on the Union's ability to make choices and prioritise areas where it is willing and able to make a difference'. As such, the document called for: 1) bolstering a number of EU policies (e.g. Common Security and Defence Policy, enlargement, counter-terrorism) with a **new sense of direction**; 2) improving the effectiveness of EU assistance to third countries, by making the mechanisms **more flexible**; 3) strengthening the EU's **leverage** in trade and development policy to protect its interests; 4) improving **coordination** of policies and funding among Member States, EU institutions, and other stakeholders; and 5) developing, aligning and exploiting **capabilities** in a more efficient way. The document also stresses the importance of destroying vertical and horizontal silos within the EU that hamper its global role.

Strategic reflection: process and content

Mogherini [presented](#) the main elements of the strategic reflection process in October 2015. In her view, a new strategy needs to provide a direction for the future, to tackle future crises and to prevent new ones. Consequently, the strategic reflection process was launched, to set a new level of ambition for the EU foreign policy in an open and inclusive way.

Interests and principles

While determining the purpose of the new strategy, it was decided that it should serve to promote and protect the interests of the EU and its citizens, in particular with regard to their security, prosperity and resilience. As argued by Mogherini, to achieve that aim, the new strategy should be guided by three main **principles**:

- **Engagement.** The EU embraces the ongoing changes, and shapes a world order based on cooperation rather than confrontation;
- **Responsibility.** Solutions to conflicts are not imposed from outside but rather result from a collective effort. To that end, the EU needs to pioneer a new form of engagement in conflicts, that supports local and regional initiatives aimed at reconciliation and resilience (academic literature calls this approach a '[hybrid peace](#)')
- **Partnership.** In a complex world, the EU needs to rethink partnerships at the regional and global level in order to strengthen its partners – be they state or non-state actors – in order to build stable, prosperous and resilient societies.

Priority areas

The focus of the ongoing debate is to make the strategy both geographically and thematically global. Consequently, the strategic reflection is [structured](#) around a set of assumptions and issues, grouped in five priority areas:

- **Strengthening global governance.** While acknowledging the critical role of the UN-based multilateral system, the EU's aim for effective global governance entails a commitment to the transformation rather than mere preservation of the existing international system. That implies that the EU will seek to reform, broaden or propose new mechanisms with a view to strengthening a rules-based order across different policy areas (e.g. cyber, energy and natural resources, oceans).
- **Supporting regional architectures.** Acknowledging the role of regions as critical spaces of governance in a decentralised world and key players on the international scene, the EU aims to support regional architectures with a view to pursuing its interests.
- **Strengthening state and societal resilience.** The strength of the European Union has been tested seriously over recent months by terrorist attacks, energy insecurity, refugee flows and the risk of hybrid destabilisation and major cyber-attacks. Countries and societies in surrounding regions are also under stress as a result of weak governance and economic and social conditions. Therefore, the EU must strengthen its own resilience and that of its Member States, as well as the countries in its neighbourhood.
- **Rethinking the EU's approach to conflict and crises.** Increasingly, modern conflicts – many of which occur in Europe's southern neighbourhood – emerge from the collapse or hollowing-out of states, the blurring of borders and the segregation of populations. In trying to solve these conflicts and build sustainable peace, the EU cannot act alone but needs to rely on regional partners and build broad, deep and durable peace coalitions.
- **Responding to the integration choice.** The EU needs to re-commit in a serious, credible and responsible way to countries which have a legitimate claim to deepening integration with the EU. This is in the EU's own interest as it strives to strengthen its global credibility and reputation.

The discussion has also addressed potential implications for the EU with regard to resources and capacities; coherence, coordination and synergies in the work of the

European institutions; and ensuring more flexibility and efficiency in ways of working. The issues and wording in each of these priority areas are still being discussed between Member States.

Process

In order to ensure co-ownership by **Member States**, each country appointed a person as national contact point (NCP) throughout the process. NCPs have met on a monthly basis to discuss and provide input on specific aspects of the strategy, including global governance, rethinking the EU's approach to conflict and crises, and strengthening state and societal resilience. The elements of the Global Strategy are also discussed with Member States' representatives within the Council, including in the Foreign Affairs Council itself and in Coreper and the Political and Security Committee. Mogherini also discussed the Global Strategy with foreign affairs and defence ministers at the informal Council meeting (Gymnich) in Amsterdam in February 2016.

The **public consultation** process kicked off with an international conference organised by the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS). A series of over 30 events has followed, to address specific issues, including security and defence, climate, cybersecurity, and developments in specific regions. Organised across the EU and in cooperation with national governments, think-tanks and research institutes, this has provided a unique opportunity to stimulate pan-European debate. Mogherini herself participated in many of these meetings, in addition to [Citizens' Dialogues](#) organised with the European Commission. To ensure that different views and opinions are heard throughout the process, the EUISS has also invited experts and policy-makers from both EU and non-EU countries to share their [views](#) on future EU priorities and ways to achieve them.

With the aim of ensuring dialogue between **EU institutions**, a task force of staff from various Commission departments was set up as a consultative body and the issue has also been [discussed](#) in the college of Commissioners. Although not formally a member of this group, the **European Parliament** and parliamentarians from Member States had several exchanges of views with Mogherini or her representatives at different stages of the process. However, given the vague wording of the mandate in the June 2015 European Council conclusions, it is not entirely clear what exactly is expected of the Commission and the European Parliament.

Next steps

Since the early stages of the strategic reflection process, Mogherini [signalled](#) that once the Global Strategy is completed, it will have to be implemented through **additional sectoral papers**. In addition to the discussion about the Global Strategy itself, the European Commission [work programme](#) for 2016 includes several initiatives (e.g. [capacity-building](#) in third countries, EU-wide strategic framework for supporting [Security Sector Reform](#), [European Defence Action Plan](#), review of the [Multiannual Financial Framework](#) 2014-2020, and a [space strategy](#) for Europe) that will have a direct or indirect impact on the EU's future foreign and security policy. In line with the European Council conclusions adopted in June 2015, Mogherini is expected to present a draft EU Global Strategy to Member States before June 2016. Around the same time, she will also present the final outcome to the European Parliament.

Member States' discussions

The fact that the European Council's discussions about the new strategy have stretched over three years is in itself an indication that the views of the Member States with

regard to the process were – and still are – [ambiguous](#). Finland, Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden have pushed for a new strategy since 2009, but the EU institutions and Member States were focused on internal processes. A broader European research community used this period for reflection on the [politics](#) of EU strategy-making and how a [new strategy](#) should look like. The strategic debate about EU external action was re-launched in 2012 with the European Global Strategy Process ([EGS](#)) endorsed by the Foreign Ministers of Italy, Poland, Spain and Sweden, and coordinated by think-tanks in their respective countries. While the project – concluded with the [final report](#) presented in May 2013 – provided a venue for reflection about the European Union's role as a global actor, it has failed to generate broader consensus among policy-makers that a new EU security strategy was needed.

The inclusive nature of the process under Mogherini's leadership has been welcomed by Member States, however some of them informally voice concerns about too much focus on the process and academic-style debates rather than on a concrete text. To feed the process, several Member States have provided input. In June 2015, the Visegrad Group countries – Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia – [insisted](#) on the key role of CSDP, more synergy between CSDP and the Area of Freedom Security and Justice, and effective coordination of different EU policies. The G4 countries – France, Italy, Germany and Spain – also circulated a non-paper in which they stressed that the next strategy will need to define a strong EU posture and a central role for CSDP. As part of the debate on future priorities, France has also circulated a non-paper on 'Digital security – towards European strategic autonomy' in which it stresses the need to defend Europe against threats to its digital space and develop Europe's strategic autonomy in the field of technology, industry and services. Several countries – including Austria, Cyprus, France, Italy, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Sweden – have also submitted their comments on the general objectives and priorities presented to date.

Stakeholders' concerns

The period of strategic reflection launched by Mogherini has provided an additional impetus to the European foreign and security policy [community](#). Given the scope of the exercise, the range of [analysis](#) and [comments](#) generated over recent months covers both thematic and regional issues. The main preoccupations – given experience with the 2008 review process – are if the final text will be [focused](#) or [strategic](#) enough and, more importantly, whether and under what conditions the EU can be a powerful foreign policy [player](#) at all. Several proposals were put on the table with regard to a broadly conceived [process](#) of strategy-making, as well as concrete proposals concerning future [priorities](#) or [building blocks](#). Some analysts are also trying to anticipate the next steps in the process by [suggesting](#) that one likely implication of the Global Strategy would be the requirement to elaborate a defence sub-strategy or 'white book'. Such a document could address the type of operations the EU should conduct and the capabilities required.

European Parliament activity

On 22 March 2016, the Foreign Affairs Committee approved its [own-initiative report](#) 'The EU in a changing global environment – a more connected, contested and complex world' (rapporteur: [Sandra Kalniete](#), EPP, Latvia). The report focuses on four main themes: defending the European Union's people, states, societies and values; stabilising Europe's wider neighbourhood; strengthening multilateral global governance; and engaging with the EU, national parliaments and European citizens. However, the

European Parliament has already dealt with issues of relevance for the EU Global Strategy. In May 2015, the EP adopted a [resolution](#) on Implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy, which stressed 'as a matter of the utmost urgency' the need for the EU and its Member States to 'adapt to the new security challenges, in particular by making effective use of the existing CSDP tools, including by linking these better to the EU's foreign affairs tools, humanitarian assistance, and development policy'. Furthermore, a parallel [resolution](#) on financing the Common Security and Defence Policy called on the HRVP and the Member States 'to unleash the full potential of the Lisbon Treaty ... with regard to a faster and more flexible use of the CSDP missions and operations'. With regard to the post-2015 global development agenda, a third [resolution](#), on financing for development, called on the EU to ensure that financing for development and climate change contributes to building resilience and preparedness, while achieving the global goal of leaving no one behind.

The Foreign Affairs Committee report on EU in the global changing environment is due to be voted in the European Parliament's April plenary session.

Relevant publications by the European Parliamentary Research Service

Regional

- Democracy in Africa: Power alternation and presidential term limits, [Briefing](#), April 2016.
- EU–Latin America trade relations: Overview and figures, [In-depth Analysis](#), March 2016.
- European Neighbourhood Policy: Migration issues, [Briefing](#), December 2015.
- The European Neighbourhood Policy, [In-depth Analysis](#), October 2015.

Thematic

- Common Foreign and Security Policy, How the EU budget is spent, [Briefing](#), March 2016.
- Protecting civilians in armed conflict, [Briefing](#), January 2016.
- Risk and resilience in foreign policy, [Briefing](#), September 2015.
- Understanding hybrid threats, [At a Glance](#), June 2015.
- Policy Coherence for Development: still some way to go, [Briefing](#), May 2015.

Oversight

- Implementation of European Council conclusions in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) since the Lisbon Treaty, [European Council Briefing](#), January 2016.

Main reference

A. Missiroli (ed.), *Towards an EU Global Strategy. Background, process, references*, [EUISS](#), 2015.

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