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THE THREATS FACING THE EU IN ITS GEOGRAPHICAL NEIGHBOURHOOD

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BRIEFING PAPER

Abstract:

The enlarged EU is confronted with a great variety of threats, risks and hazards potentially coming from its periphery. These, however, are quite different from the traditional ones of the past, and interact with one another in changeable and sometimes unpredictable ways. In turn, also the new “neighbourhood” of the EU includes very diverse situations and players, which require specific tools to be addressed. There is no single threat/risk/hazard coming from the broader “neighbourhood” that can be effectively tackled with a one-size-fits-all approach or through only one of the many policies the EU can resort to – neither the ENP proper, nor SSR, not even ESDP, in whichever of its variants. The Union should overcome the persistent fragmentation of its policy instruments. It needs better coordination and more coherence between its different bodies and competences, and it must also acquire a broader view (geographically as well as functionally) of the root causes of its old and new vulnerabilities.

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Threats facing the EU in its geographical neighbourhood

Introduction

It is commonly assumed that the enlarged EU is no longer threatened by large-scale direct military aggression. Any new “threat” assessment must therefore assume, in turn, that there are *other* contingencies that may come to threaten, if not the physical existence of the Union and its member states, at least the ordinary functioning of European societies and/or the daily life of their citizens.

This is why a preliminary discussion of both terms defining this study - “geographical neighbourhood” as well as “threats” – is required.

I. What ‘neighbourhood’

There is an accepted institutional definition of “neighbourhood” that basically coincides with the countries involved in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), as carried out since 2004. These are:

- a) the Eastern neighbours of the Union: Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova - but not Russia, that opted out of the ENP framework from the outset and for developing bilateral cooperation with the Union on an allegedly more ‘equal’ basis;
- b) the three South Caucasus republics, incorporated into the ENP scheme in June 2004: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia;
- c) the ten Southern Mediterranean countries already involved in the Barcelona Process: Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria.

With the EU accession of Bulgaria and Romania in January 2007 and the ongoing negotiations with Turkey, an additional autonomous ‘space’ could be added, encompassing the broader Black Sea region.

However, Turkey itself, as long as it is not a full member of the EU, could be considered as part of the geographical (though not strictly institutional) “neighbourhood” of the enlarged Union, as it lies at the juncture between the Balkans, the Black Sea, the South Caucasus and the Middle East.

Similarly, and not just because of the accession negotiations with Croatia, the Western Balkans could be included in this study. The fact that they have a clearer prospect of

joining the EU than a), b), and obviously c) does not exclude them from this assessment – on the contrary.

Furthermore, one could go as far as to extend such wider neighbourhood to Iraq, Iran and possibly even Afghanistan, considering not only the situation on the ground but also the presence of European military and civilian personnel in those areas.

For the purpose of this study, however, the specific threats posed by the ‘arc of instability’ that goes from Iraq to Pakistan and Central Asia will be considered only indirectly, i.e. for their possible ramifications and repercussions into the areas mentioned above.

Finally, it is a moot point whether those countries that the Commission defines as “the neighbours of the neighbours” - most notably in Central Asia – should be included in this assessment. They are expected to be the object of a distinct policy initiative on the part of the current German EU Presidency, but their direct potential impact on the Union still remains a bit elusive.

II. What ‘threats’

For the definition of “threat” in this particular context, it seems appropriate to resort in the first instance to the European Security Strategy (ESS) approved by the European Council in December 2003 ¹.

The ESS identified five “key threats” – all new, and also “more diverse, less visible and less predictable” than the traditional military ones:

- 1) international terrorism;
- 2) proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD);
- 3) regional conflicts;
- 4) State failure;
- 5) organised crime.

These key threats may also manifest themselves in various combinations with one another, with an evident ‘multiplier’ effect in terms of impact.

The body of literature on international security, for its part, now tends to break down the broad notion of “threat” to *threats* proper, *risks* and *hazards*: these, in turn, may well turn into threats in their own right. The difference is mainly one of intensity and urgency: risks and hazards leave more room (and time) for prevention, mitigation and containment, whereas threats tend to require an immediate response. Taken all together, they define the level of *vulnerability* of a given State, society, or region ².

Last but not least, the ESS mentioned also a number of “global challenges” linked, at least in part, to the process of globalisation: poverty and deprivation, disease, energy

¹ A Secure Europe in a Better World (www.iss.europa.eu).

² For an overview see Terriff, T. et al., *Security Studies Today*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999.

dependence, competition for natural resources, and the peculiar link between security and development.

III. A first assessment

By combining all these geographical and functional criteria with one another, it is possible to come to a first definition and assessment of the “threats facing the EU in its geographical neighbourhood”. The following considerations, however, are mainly based on indirect sources, ‘qualitative’ considerations and personal evaluations, and aim at just offering a bird’s eye view of the issue, without claiming full objectivity or completeness:

- 1) *Terrorism* per se does not seem to originate exclusively or primarily from the immediate geographical neighbourhood of the Union, although the threat is well present inside such countries as Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Egypt (not to mention Turkey). Its root causes are at the same time broader and narrower, external and internal: it is not just about Al Qaida-related networks, and it often combines local and global ‘causes’ in order to recruit and operate more effectively. Unresolved conflicts in the wider Middle East (the ‘cradle’ of international terrorism, though not directly adjacent to the territory of the EU); failing states in delicate areas (Afghanistan, Sudan, Somalia); ethnically, politically and/or religiously rooted tensions; fundamentalism coupled with radicalism; and also social or cultural exclusion inside the EU itself have been earmarked as potential sources, often intertwined and overlapping with one another. On the other hand, neither the Balkan wars of the past decade nor the persistent ethnic tensions in the wider Caucasus region have had a traceable impact on domestic terrorism in the EU, which still has also specific indigenous sources within some member states. More worrisome is the possibility that the EU becomes - by virtue of its internal liberties - an area of transit and possibly training for actual and potential terrorists coming from the broader neighbourhood (as defined above), let alone a breeding ground for home-grown ones;
- 2) The *proliferation of WMD* has come to be seen as a concrete risk for (if not a direct threat to) Europe only in recent times, after at least a decade of relative strategic ‘safety’ following the end of the Cold War. Yet the appreciation of such a risk tends to vary significantly, be it the case with Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme, North Korea’s tests, or terrorist groups carrying biological weapons and even ‘mini-nukes’. As a consequence, the need to protect the EU ‘homeland’ from these risks or threats is also controversial, as the recent disputes over the anti-missile ‘shield’ in Poland and the Czech Republic show. In this particular case - whatever one may think of the desirability, feasibility and/or effectiveness of missile defence - the issue of protecting the Euro-Atlantic area from quintessentially strategic threats seems more one for NATO than the EU as such: and this is true in military, political, and also legal terms. The strategic interest of the EU to prevent and/or contain WMD proliferation, however, goes well beyond actual or possible threats to its own territory and society: it is rather part of the Union’s global commitments and responsibilities - much as a possible nuclear arms race in the

Middle East (involving both State and non-State actors) would certainly change perceptions also in this respect;

- 3) *Regional conflicts* are arguably less of a direct threat to Europe today than they were in the last decade of the XX century, but still a reality to deal with. On the one hand, the kind of solution that will be given to Kosovo's final status may reactivate ethnic violence in the Western Balkans, with potential ripple effects onto and into the EU itself, due also to the presence of numerous expatriate communities. On the other, such quintessential 'frozen' conflicts as those concerning Transdnistria, Abkhasia, South Ossetia and also Nagorno-Karabach may well degenerate into violent ones at any given time in the future, thus exporting instability into the Eastern and South-Eastern 'rims' of the enlarged EU (including Turkey). The overall situation in the wider Middle East is still worrying both per se and for the cascading effects it can produce elsewhere, including in the EU proper: what has happened in Lebanon since last summer offers sufficient evidence of the overall fragility of the region and its destabilising potential. Finally, conflicts may generate risks even when they occur in faraway regions as they can trigger waves of refugees, asylum seekers or just illegal immigrants flocking to the EU via its neighbouring countries, East and South: recent analyses have shown how far (East) the trail that brings 'boat people' to the Canary Islands in Spain via Mauritania tends to stretch, making it all the more difficult to locate its ultimate sources;
- 4) *State failure* per se does not seem to be a relevant feature in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, at least not in the shape it has taken in Somalia or Liberia. Still, 'frozen' conflicts may produce such an effect, and weak and fragile States do abound on the periphery of the Union, from the Western Balkans to the South Caucasus. Lebanon and Iraq, too, constitute now major sources of concern in this respect, while the semi-authoritarian regimes in the Maghreb and the Mashrek - though hardly classifiable as weak or fragile at first sight - look quite vulnerable to religious fundamentalism and radical movements bordering with terrorism. Weakness and fragility derive from a number of causes, including lack of resources, lack of legitimacy, lack of accountability and even, to some extent, lack of freedom, human rights and democracy. These, in turn, may contribute to corruption and illegality – all potentially dangerous for the neighbouring EU – and create a favourable setting for
- 5) *Organised crime*, which is significantly widespread on both sides of the Union frontiers. Cross-border trafficking in drugs, women, migrants, weapons, and all sorts of stolen goods is a major threat to our societies, although it does not necessarily take the shape of a violent one. Criminal networks extend well beyond the current EU and can operate effectively inside it, in its immediate neighbourhood, and also worldwide: their business often has a legal cover and is hardly traceable without the active cooperation of state authorities in the neighbouring countries (which, in turn, is very hard to obtain in the presence of widespread corruption and complicity). Finally, organised crime is also often intertwined with all the other risks and threats listed above - of which it can be a cause, an effect, or just a collateral phenomenon.

IV. Russia and energy

Still, the geographical and functional criteria illustrated and ‘operationalised’ above do not cover the whole spectrum of potential threats – or rather *vulnerabilities* – that may stem from the actual “neighbourhood” of the EU.

First of all, though technically not part of the official “neighbourhood”, *Russia* does represent an awkward and at times worrisome neighbour for the EU. Moscow is a key player in a number of controversial issues (see above), from the final settlement for Kosovo to the ‘frozen’ conflicts in Transdnistria and the South Caucasus, let alone the Israeli-Palestinian peace process or Iran’s nuclear enrichment programme. It is also a force to be reckoned with in the INF-related dispute regarding the anti-missile ‘shield’ in Poland and the Czech Republic, regardless of its actual objectives in it. Numerous cross-border activities that entail smuggling and trafficking stem from Russia - as now does also the risk of a ‘bird flu’ pandemic - and tend to use other neighbouring countries of the EU as transit areas.

Yet the decisive factor in determining the perception of Russia as a worrisome neighbour has indeed been *energy*, namely the way in which the supply of oil and especially gas to Central Europe was disrupted and became hostage to bilateral controversies first between Russia and Ukraine (January 2006), then between Russia and Belarus (December 2006). On both occasions, entire regions in Central Europe felt (once again) at the mercy of Moscow – and in the middle of winter – while Russia’s reliability as a provider was put into question also by other EU member states.

Whatever the specific reasons for the two crises, in fact, the combination of those and Moscow’s increasing assertiveness on a number of foreign policy issues (especially Kosovo and Iran) has strengthened the perception of a “hostile” Russia at the borders of the enlarged EU, exercising political pressure on Kyiv and Minsk, blackmailing the EU and, more recently, even putting into question the 20-year-old INF (Intermediate Nuclear Forces) Treaty with Washington. As a result, Poland’s newly elected leaders went as far as to propose a “NATO for energy” and, later on, NATO itself raised the fear of a sort of “gas OPEC” forming itself among the main providers.

Russia and its recent conduct may not amount to a fully-fledged *threat*, or series thereof, despite the recurrent talk in the international media of a “cold peace” between Moscow and the West. Yet the EU’s dependency on external energy sources, already mentioned in the ESS as a “challenge”, has lately gone further up the broader security policy agenda of the Union, while also underlining the high level of exposure and vulnerability of European societies. In addition, the increasing dynamism and ruthlessness of India and especially China in securing the necessary resources for their fast-growing economies has highlighted the risk of an ever sharper international competition for energy - one in which the EU could well find itself at a disadvantage.

Although energy markets are increasingly global, much of the world’s gas and oil reserves lie in unstable and often undemocratic states and regions. Resource-rich countries are more liable to internal tensions, instability, authoritarianism and even conflict, as in particular the past two decades have abundantly shown. It is the so-

called “resource curse” highlighted by the literature on security and development, be it about timber in Burma, copper in New Guinea, diamonds in Sierra Leone, minerals in Congo and, of course, oil in many places³. Some of these countries – notably those that are crucial for the Union’s supply – lie in its neighbourhood as either provider or transit countries: to the East, the South-East (the Black Sea/Caucasus ‘hub’), the Middle East itself and the Maghreb, not to mention Sudan. On top of that, terrorist actions may well target pipelines, pits and natural reserves, thus raising the issue of how physically to secure i.a. supply lines and infrastructures. All this may require an upgrading of energy supply shortages to the rank of a *risk*, if not yet a direct threat proper.

V. Other risks and hazards

The EU’s overall exposure and vulnerability, however, are not limited to the factors and players mentioned above. Especially if one takes a broader approach to security - one that encompasses also the ability of our societies and systems to function properly and orderly - the amount of variables and contingencies to be considered grows significantly.

Some of these fall, once again, into the “global challenges” category as defined in the ESS⁴. This is the case with the risk of *pandemics* hitting the EU territory and population: AIDS was spectacularly on the rise, a few years ago, in Western Russia and the areas of Eastern Europe bordering more directly with Belarus and Ukraine (not to mention Kaliningrad). More recently, a growing number of cases of ‘bird flu’ have occurred inside the EU as a result of cross-border poultry trade from regions (including Russia, Ukraine, and Romania) in which veterinary controls and standards were far less accurate: the risk is not limited to animal health as, in those conditions, the H5N1 virus may easily mutate and spread among humans before a vaccine is tested. Finally, illegal migrants from sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the world landing on Southern European beaches may be carriers of viruses still absent from EU territory (in fairness, however, no specific case in point has been officially registered so far).

It is difficult to assess exactly how much *climate change* and the resulting global warming have determined the rise in *natural disasters* and calamities occurred in Europe over the past few years. Earthquakes have long been a familiar phenomenon in certain parts of the EU (Italy, Greece/Turkey). More recently, however, urban heat waves, forest fires (the Mediterranean regions), floods (Central Europe), and environmental degradation at large (almost everywhere) have increasingly come to represent emergencies that, due to their cross-border nature and impact, require coordinated attention and action. Some of them may well originate from the EU’s immediate neighbourhood: water pollution in the Baltic, Black and Caspian Seas is a case in point. But environmental degradation, natural and also man-made disasters in other parts of the world may also impact on the EU by generating instability, chaos,

³ De Soysa, I., ‘The Resource Curse: Are Civil Wars Driven by Rapacity or Paucity?’, in: Berdal, M. and Malone, D. (eds.), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Lynne Rienner, Boulder, 2000, pp.113-135.

⁴ See Missiroli, A. (ed.), *Disasters, Diseases, Disruptions: A New D-Drive for the EU*, Chaillot Paper no.83, EUISS, Paris, September 2005.

and uncontrollable collateral effects on the movement of people and goods in the Union's periphery.

More generally, climate change is likely to generate a number of *environmental stress factors*, including rising sea levels, soil degradation, and water scarcity. These, in turn, may well affect crops, biodiversity, and also human living conditions in Europe as well as worldwide, making entire regions inhabitable and triggering mass migration. Dramatic climate change may generate many losers, along with a few apparent winners. Many experts underline, for instance, that human migration currently occurs mainly within Africa and only marginally from Africa to Europe: in a couple of decades, however, the effects of climate change may drive it north in a spectacular fashion. By contrast, global warming may actually improve living conditions in the North, albeit only temporarily, and a country like Russia may even benefit from its rich water reservoirs and, through ice melting in the Arctic Sea, even gain easy access to new oil fields for drilling. Finally, climate change may also be a more or less direct source of conflict proper: water scarcity in the Middle East is already a major destabilising factor, and some analysts have gone as far as to describe the situation in Darfur as the first crisis triggered by global warming and its effects.

Similar considerations apply to quintessentially man-made *industrial incidents* such as oil spills, chemical leaks or nuclear explosions, be they strictly inside or just outside the EU territory: oil spots know no maritime borders, toxic waste spreads easily and quickly, and so do nuclear radiations. Neighbouring countries with lower standards and looser control and monitoring systems may therefore constitute wild cards for the Union's *societal security*⁵.

Last but not least, technological glitches, IT piracy and cyber-crime (the so-called "malware", malicious software) may well come to unravel the regular day-to-day functioning of the Union's economic and administrative systems, generating cascading effects that can have a tangible impact on the (actual and perceived) security and safety of EU citizens. Power grids and electronic networks are increasingly interconnected: hostile and harmful actions, therefore, may come from anywhere in the world. Yet it is a fact that, for instance, Russia-based hackers and Islamic fundamentalist organisations have repeatedly tried to penetrate and undermine all sorts of command and control systems also in EU countries.

VI. What response(s)

If the array of security hazards/risks/threats potentially coming from the Union's "neighbourhood" is so wide (and fuzzy), and the vulnerability of the EU as a community of interwoven states and societies so high, the policy responses - in terms of prevention, mitigation, and reaction proper - should be equally complex and varied.

In this respect, the *European Neighbourhood Policy* (ENP) launched by the EU in 2004 does not seem able, all by itself, to address and significantly reduce the exposure and vulnerability of the Union. The impact assessment made by the Commission in its

⁵ The notion was first coined by Waeber, O., 'Societal Security: The Concept', in: Waeber, O. et al., *Identity, Migration, and the New Security Agenda in Europe*, CPCRC Copenhagen, Pinter, London, 1993, pp.17-40.

Communication of 4 December 2006 shows that positive results have been achieved only with those countries that were already improving their overall performance regardless of the ENP: Ukraine, Morocco and Jordan (Israel being a special case). With other countries - such as Tunisia or Egypt, not to mention Algeria - there has been no progress worth this name, while Belarus and to a lesser extent Libya remain basically disengaged. Whatever one may think of the ENP in its own right, the kind of incentives it can offer to the neighbours can hardly make a difference in security terms, although they can certainly contribute to supporting positive developments in the direction of better governance in the medium to long term.

Insofar as it is still mainly a policy of good neighbourly relations backed up by economic assistance, in fact, the ENP (or “ENP-plus”, as it has been recently re-branded) has limited scope and a low impact on the set of risks/threats described above. Insofar as its ambitions are wider and stronger, however, it appears to be lacking the means to fulfil them. On the one hand, in fact, incisive domestic political and economic reforms in the neighbouring countries can hardly be fostered without the biggest incentive of all, namely the prospect of EU membership in a foreseeable future (and the ENP is, at best, “enlargement-neutral”). On the other, an effective fight against terrorism, illegal immigration, and organised crime in/from the “neighbourhood” can hardly be carried out without engaging all the resources of both the Commission (not just DG Relex) and the member states themselves, let alone other European-based and international players.

In other words, the ENP suffers from being neither enlargement nor foreign policy proper: it cannot bring to bear the full “transformational power” of the accession process, nor the joint resources and the overall political clout of a truly common foreign and security policy. This said, it can have an impact insofar as it manages to link incentives and rewards to performance and to better differentiate between Eastern and South-Eastern neighbours – who are more distinctly “European” (the partnership can be closer and deeper) and pose specific problems – and Southern and Middle Eastern ones, whose ‘mix’ of problems is markedly different.

The overall package of actions and initiatives (whether Community- or Council-driven) that fall within the category of *Security Sector Reform* (SSR) may also have an impact on certain aspects of the problem. They can contribute to state-building and better governance, thus tackling such issues as organised crime and corruption in the public sector - especially in the Balkans, where NATO is also a key player, and arguably also in the immediate Eastern “neighbourhood”. Indeed, a factual and pragmatic division of labour between the Union and the Alliance has taken shape in the region, and the expectation is that it can eventually deliver – on the condition that the prospect of future membership is credibly put on the table by both organisations⁶.

Similarly, civilian and military missions conducted within the framework of the *European Security and Defence Policy* (ESDP) have had and can still have a tangible preventive and/or mitigating effect on some of those issues. This certainly applies, once again, to the *Western Balkans*, as proved also by the operational record to date in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and especially Bosnia-Herzegovina.

⁶ See Haenggi, H., and Tanner, F., *Promoting Security Sector Governance in the EU’s Neighbourhood*, Chaillot Paper no.80, EUISS, Paris, July 2005.

Needless to say, the already planned EU FOR civilian operation in Kosovo will prove crucial for the stabilisation and securitisation of the region; in perspective, it could even prepare the ground for an EU takeover of NATO's KFOR, following the example of SFOR in Bosnia. Still, it will be crucial to integrate ESDP mission(s) proper with other forms of EU intervention in terms of administrative and economic support, and also SSR-related actions as carried out by the Commission. In other words, ESDP alone is unlikely to solve all the issues that make this particular "neighbourhood" a source of risks and possibly even threats for the EU. A comprehensive, coherent, and long-term approach is required, including effective coordination with other players and organisations (essentially, NATO and the UN), both centrally and on the ground. And here, too, the ultimate guarantee of an EU membership prospect looks essential to having the desired security policy impact.

Similarly, ESDP can make a difference also in the *Eastern neighbourhood* of the Union, where border-monitoring and rule of law operations have helped contain trafficking-related risks. Much more, however, can be achieved in this domain, especially if it became politically possible to deploy more substantial teams of custom officers and train civil servants, backing all this up with appropriate schemes meant to curb corruption and smuggling. Yet the problem here may lie, once again, with Russia, as it represents at the same time part of the solution (as an indispensable partner whose consensus is often required to carry out actions in the region) and part of the problem, either for its foreign policy positions or as a sanctuary for criminal gangs operating across borders.

As for the *Middle East*, EU/European engagement on a number of fronts is providing a tangible contribution to threat reduction, and ESDP is now also part of that picture, most notably in the Palestinian Territories. In the specific case of South Lebanon, UNIFIL-2 is in fact a sort of ESDP operation in disguise: it also highlights at the same time the flexibility that may be necessary when it comes to launching such missions, and possibly the constraints that the current legal set-up (including the rules for involving "third countries" in EU-led operations) creates to the Union's "foreign policy". The relative impact of ESDP in the region remains modest, however, and not particularly well connected to other forms of EU external action (including the Stability Instrument). Yet again, a problem of coherence and coordination with Community-related activities arises, and still awaits a solution – which is made all the more urgent by the complex nature of the "threats" described above.

In the *Mediterranean* proper, the ESDP activities that appear most feasible and effective, so far, are those connected to military training for and exercises with some regional partners. Their impact, however, remains limited and uneven, and depends very much on the level of cooperation established with each relevant country. In some cases, it proves easier to resort to forms of bilateral cooperation with individual EU countries, as ESDP per se is often still seen as a "threat" by local leaders. In a way, that is, ESDP tends to meet the same problems as the ENP in this area.

For its part, the fight against terrorism is not *primarily* conducted through EU bodies and institutions. Even surveillance activities tend to be carried out by other actors (e.g. NATO during the 2004 Olympics in Athens). Intelligence cooperation occurs *also* at the EU level, of course, in part through the Council's Situation Centre (SITCEN) and in part within the dedicated Working Groups. Europol, based in The Hague,

contributes to that too. DG Justice, Liberty and Security in the European Commission is in charge of the exchange of personal data across the Atlantic, while other common EU bodies oversee and monitor financial transactions. Still, a fair share of the work in this domain takes place in ad hoc fora, either bilateral or 'mini-lateral', and well beyond the European setting alone.

Regarding the "other risks and hazards" mentioned above, both the Commission (virtually all DGs) and the Council Secretariat have developed a series of *situation centres* in order to recon and monitor potential crises, and to connect rapidly with the relevant professional experts and administrative bodies in the member states. Some of these have already proved effective in their own domain, be it environment, animal health, consumer protection, or external relations proper. Yet they all have done so separately from one another, without any coordination or common 'design'. Only recently has the Commission set up an internal communication network (called ARGUS) to this end, but it remains still largely untested. Joint simulations and exercises on how to respond to cross-border emergencies have also been conducted, but more are probably required, preferably involving also the closest among the current neighbours, where such emergencies may well originate in the first place – with a view to enhancing awareness and preparedness.

Finally, the EU *Constitutional Treaty* (EUCT) offers at least two institutional avenues that could allow a more effective and coherent response to the security hazards/risks/threats that may stem from the Union's neighbourhood at large. One is, of course, the creation of the "Union Minister for Foreign Affairs" (*cum* dedicated European External Action Service), whose double 'hat' would, in principle: a) facilitate synergy and coordination between Community, Council, and member states' means and capabilities; and b) help contain internal bureaucratic competition for turf and funding. All the problems of coherence and coordination mentioned above - that are particularly important for dealing with the multi-faceted risks and threats described in this paper - would be framed in a much more favourable context, although not necessarily solved overnight.

The other one is the so-called "solidarity clause" enshrined in artt. I-43 and III-329: though not binding, it would permit – if taken seriously by all – to join up national and common resources and capacities and to develop shared approaches to most of the new hazards and risks coming from both inside the Union and its neighbourhood. Interestingly, the "clause" assigns the operational responsibility for mobilising and coordinating joint efforts in this domain - be they carried out inside the Union's territory or just outside – to the Political and Security Committee, thus expanding significantly (albeit somewhat indirectly) the remit of ESDP.

VII. Conclusion

The main challenge for achieving a common assessment of the possible "threats facing the EU in its geographical neighbourhood" is about *perceptions*. In fact, these differ markedly among the member states (and their respective citizens), shaped as they are by a mix of hard evidence and specific historical and geopolitical factors. It does matter a lot whether one is in Poland or in Spain, in Britain or in Slovenia when it comes to determining what may constitute a risk or a threat: in part, such

risks/threats are just different - between East and South, for instance - and create specific vulnerabilities that largely transcend the existing borders; in part, they overlap and concur to highlighting common trends across the continent. Finding a balance and a trade-off between such different perceptions and the various policy responses required has already constituted to date a very demanding task for all the players involved.

In this respect, arguably, the latest enlargements of the EU have widened the spectrum of perceptions inside the Union even further, and probably made a shared assessment more complicated to achieve. A similar effect has been generated also by energy supply shortages and climate-related emergencies, let alone the dramatic increase in illegal immigration from the South and human trafficking from the East (which follow distinct patterns and avenues).

All this may well require some trade-offs among the member states. To facilitate this, it could be useful to launch - in a couple of years' time - a targeted review of the 2003 ESS in light of these latest developments. It could possibly turn into a sort of final Joint Report by the Commission (as a whole) and the High Representative for CFSP right before the expiration of their current mandates, in the spring of 2009. The "jointness" of the Report would contribute to clarifying that neither Community policies (under whatever rubric) nor CFSP/ESDP-related ones, alone, can effectively tackle - or solve, for that matter - the intricate web of issues that render the EU as a whole still "vulnerable", although in ways that differ greatly from the past.

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