
The European Security Strategy and the global role of the European Union in the 21st century

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Abstract

This paper acknowledges the sui generis nature of the EU and the difference it has made in European foreign policy action due to the fact that the EU is and acts as something which cannot be compared with any existing international subject. In order to determine whether the EU is a global actor we intend to establish inferences based on the various interpretations given by researchers and scholars to the external action of the EU in the 21st century in an essay on the conceptualizations of power and actorness in global politics. In the end, we will analyze the provisions laid down by the European Security Strategy in order to determine how and with what means the EU proposes to address future security challenges in Europe and at global level and to what extent it has managed to fulfill those objectives and respond to the expectations it projected.

Key words: Normative Power Europe, European Union, soft power, European Security Strategy

Introduction

THE PROSPECT OF the EU acting as a global actor has attracted increased attention from IR scholars in the last decade in the context of the ongoing transformations of the international system marked by a redistribution of power against the background of an emerging environment of global insecurity.

Weighing the little concern of the EU for the defence of European security in the last decade of the 20th century against the expectations of the international community some feared that EU actorness in world politics lost momentum. And yet, after long negotiations and setbacks, the EU member states managed to define the operational guidelines of the common foreign and security policy¹. The external context in which these developments took place was a particular one. Right before the EU enlargement to Central and

¹ The European Security and Defence Policy was laid down in the Treaty of Amsterdam (1999).

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Eastern Europe there was a dramatic change in the perceptions of global security against the background of the unprecedented terrorist attacks and the surge of new multifaceted threats. These developments prompted Western democracies to rally against a common enemy by rethinking the collective security paradigm under the lead of the United States. The EU seized this opportunity and adopted an extended security agenda for the future (European Security Strategy, 2003) by which it claimed a distinctive place in the international system and a more engaging role in managing the threats coming from its near abroad and beyond. Over the past decade, the EU has tried to affirm a global actor profile by joining the efforts of the international community in the management of international crises in many parts of the world for several reasons: humanitarian causes, the commitments taken towards the US allies, the United Nations and the OSCE, the stakeholders' expectations for increased EU engagement, or geopolitical reasons. However, the decisional process underpinning the creation of a common foreign and security policy was not always smooth and the enthusiasm of the European leaders was often mismatched by unconvincing actions.

Nowadays, because most of the European nations are key NATO allies in international military operations, the EU collective actions abroad cannot rely on 'hard power'. Nevertheless, the predominantly civilian interventions of the EU in problem areas around the world provide a certain complementarity that actually makes the EU a distinctive player in conflict management. As the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon set the premises for a more unified EU presence in the world, the EU governments are expected to produce prompt common actions. Using soft tools such as political negotiation, multilateral dialogue and the use of economic incentives, which already proved successful in recovering mutual trust and building security in some conflict-ridden societies, the EU has the potential to be acknowledged as an indispensable global actor.

The European Union – actor and power in the 21st century

The importance of the role played by the EU in world affairs has been under a lot of scrutiny, either due to the more traditionalist conceptions claiming that only nation-states are actors in international politics (Ginsberg, 2001: 12) or because foreign affairs are normally understood in the limits of classical diplomacy and 'hard power', areas in which the EU still lags behind other international actors. At least this is why we believe that the EU's commitment to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and to promote good governance and regional cooperation in other parts of the world, as conspicuous as they may be, are not as visible as the so-called 'high politics'. But actorness in world af-

fairs may be defined also as the ability to influence others without necessarily bearing the attributes of statehood (Hill, 2007: 4). Unfortunately, the intergovernmental nature of EU foreign and security policy is limiting the chances for the EU to be fully recognised as a collective actor. According to C. Hill, the “capabilities-expectations gap” (Hill, 1993: 318) prevents the EU from being recognized as a unitary and results-oriented player in international politics. In Hill’s opinion, when the expectations of the member states exceed the EU’s capabilities is created an excessive optimism about the external performances of the EU, which drops dramatically in the event of a failure. Reversely, if the EU actions abroad create false hopes, the member states become ultra-realistic and fail to appreciate the actual potential of the EU as a common force.

The EU has been concerned with getting international recognition as a single voice for many years now, but this evolution has been rather unsteady and at times contradictory. From the Treaty of Maastricht (1993) to the Treaty of Lisbon (2009) the EU functioned on a three-pillar structure, which partly explains the different degrees of engagement in international politics. On the one hand, the EU proved more successful in influencing global trends in areas where it already developed a common policy (1st pillar), such as the environment, foreign trade, development and humanitarian assistance, and agriculture. On the other hand, its leverage has been significantly lower in the field of security and defence policies (2nd pillar). But the influence of the European Union in global politics can also depend on other factors. If we consider the impact of its actions, although it hardly relies on military instruments, the EU has a comparative advantage in peace-building and conflict prevention due to the success of its civilian missions. However, those who support a more united and integrated Europe see common defence as an indispensable step in gaining more global visibility, although ‘hard power’ may eventually overshadow the virtues of ‘civilian power Europe’ (Hill, 2007: 5).

According to M. Telò, the capability criteria used for assessing the global role of an actor against the nation-state model can be defined as follows: “a community of interests, a decision-making system, an independent system for crisis management, a system of policy implementation, external communication channels and representation, an appropriated amount of common resources” (Telò, 2007: 302). Based on this definition, the incoherencies of EU decision-making in the sphere of CFSP, concerning mainly the opportunity to act and the level of engagement, have had a negative impact on the external image of the EU.

In a more nuanced approach, Bretherton and Vogler conceptualize the role of the EU as a global actor from a socio-constructive perspective based on the notions of ‘opportunity’, ‘presence’ and ‘capability’ (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006). According to them, EU global actorness is “a function both of external opportunities and internal capabilities”

expressed in the framework of social interaction processes:

“Opportunity denotes factors in the external environment of ideas and events which constrain or enable actorness [...] Presence conceptualizes the ability of the EU, by virtue of its existence, to exert influence beyond its borders [...] Capability refers to the internal context of EU external action – the availability of policy instruments and understandings about the Union’s ability to utilize these instruments, in response to opportunity and/or to capitalize on presence” (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006: 24).

Among IR theories constructivism brings a particular interpretation of global politics by analyzing a structure (i.e. the world) based on the meanings and perceptions attached to it by an agent. Applied to the role of the EU in the international system the agent-structure analysis reveals the EU’s “capacity to shape events inside and outside its borders, either by its own will [...] or in response to the external actor’s expectations and demands” (Tonra, 2006: 124). Hence, from a socio-constructivist perspective duality is an inherent feature of this peculiar political project named the European Union.

From a Realist perspective, analyzing the EU as a global actor involves taking into account three basic roles played by the EU: 1. An instrument for the collective economic interests of its member states (traditionally, the finality of the former European Economic Community); 2. An instrument for the remodeling of the regional environment (by means of the enlargement policy, external actions, the European Neighborhood Policy etc.); 3. A vehicle for promoting the normative concerns of its member states (human rights protection, the abolition of capital punishment, the spread of democratic values, the protection of the environment, and fighting poverty) (Hyde-Price, 2008: 31-32). Considering this last point, the EU is, theoretically, an “ethical power” (Hyde-Price, 2007: 107) which acts as a “force for good” in the world by promoting values and principles of universal applicability and by reflecting cosmopolitan norms (Hyde-Price, 2008: 32). However, referring to E.H. Carr’s statement that “theories of morality are the product of dominant nations or groups of nations” who seek to impose their one-sided views on the rest of the world, A. Hyde-Price thinks that universal claims in a pluralist and diverse world often dissimulate the national interests of states (Hyde-Price, 2008: 33). Looked at from this angle, the EU seems to conduct its external actions by the motto “what is good for me is good for everyone else”, which proved to be a destructive US foreign policy strategy in the first decade of the 21st century. Even more in the case of the EU, a foreign policy based on ethical concerns is unlikely due to the major differences of opinion among EU member states. This is particularly true if we consider the EU’s inability to draw up a common approach towards the Russian Federation, for example, in spite of the multiple interdependencies underpinning regional relations. Although the EU governments have raised concerns about the level of human rights protection and the rule of law in Russia,

the EU is still unable to obtain agreement on sanctioning these abuses. This is even more difficult as leading European nations like France and Germany defend their individual interests at the expense of a more visible presence of the EU as a common voice.

The ethical grounds of EU external action may be disputed, but spreading positive norms and standards has been a real concern for the EU. According to D. W. Lovell, the EU is firmly committed to promoting democratic values abroad due to the success of the EU integration which proved that democracy sharing mitigates security challenges. In the same logic, the efforts to democratize peripheral regions, such as the Mediterranean space, are aimed at countering the threat of illegal immigration in the EU (Lovell, 2007: 109). Yet, sometimes when EU normative concerns are faced with mixed political, strategic and economic calculations, the short-term stability of some regions is preferred at the cost of the tacit support of authoritarian regimes (Lovell, 2007: 124).

In the last few years also the normative nature of EU foreign policy was vividly disputed in the IR literature. ‘Normative Power Europe’ (NPE) is an innovative concept introduced by I. Manners as a middle ground between ‘soft’ and ‘hard power’. The EU global role is analysed in the light of the impact that ideas and norms have on international relations (Manners, 2002: 238-239). By defining the normative influence of the EU norms, principles and ideas beyond borders, Manners endorses the *sui generis* nature of the EU as a post-sovereign and post-Westphalian entity. According to Manners, in spite of its eclectic historical evolution, its hybrid nature and its multi-state architecture, the EU projects an ideational force which shapes conceptions of “normal” in international relations in line with its unique normative basis (Manners, 2002: 239). Referring in particular to the abolition of capital punishment he claims that, unlike more developed states like the US and Japan, the EU not only acts as a normative power, but also militates in favor of norm diffusion at global level (Manners, 2002: 252-253). In a spirit of solidarity triggered by its norm-driven identity, the EU diffuses values and norms by its mere presence in global affairs, thus contributing to the expansion of social justice in the world (Manners, 2002: 239).

Yet, the EU cannot claim to be a normative power unless the others recognize its moral legitimacy. In a critique of the ‘Normative Power Europe’ concept, M. Merlingen (2007: 436) sees it as an obstacle to objective analysis of post-sovereign Europe. Merlingen points out to the fact that the “understanding of power and norms remains partly under the influence of a tradition of political theory at the core of which is the notion of sovereignty” (Merlingen, 2007: 438). Hence, he proposes to analyse “power” and “norms” separately in order to find out what they show and what they hide about norm diffusion in the world and concludes that there is a downside to the post-sovereign EU normative power: “the values it projects abroad do limit the degradation and humiliation of individ-

uals, but they also subject local orders to Europe's normativizing universalist pretensions. [...] [T]he power NPE brings to bear on problems in poor and conflict-ridden societies humanizes and improves the life of populations, but it also creates patterns of arbitrary domination between internationals and locals." (Merlingen, 2007: 449).

In their own critique of the 'Normative Power Europe' other authors seem to agree that EU foreign policy, in the same way as the US foreign policy, is based on strategic calculations and that the EU normative agenda conceals the individual material interests of the member states (Hyde-Price, 2006; Smith, 2001; Youngs, 2004). Moreover, according to Nicolaidis and Howse (2002) the EU's self-representation as a "force for good" in global politics reveals a lack of reflexivity because the EU deliberately overlooks the fact that sometimes even its member states elude the norms they are supposed to endorse and promote in external actions.

The conceptual ambiguity of the 'Normative Power Europe' is also raised by H. Sjursen who claims that "it remains unclear how the term 'power' which is often seen to allude to 'coercion', can be articulated to the term 'normative', which is typically taken to allude to 'legitimacy'" (Sjursen, 2006: 172). According to Sjursen, many foreign policy actors pursue some kind of a normative agenda because norms can be many things, including good and bad influence. Hence, a major problem is "the often implicit link between the pursuit of norms and the idea that the EU is 'doing good' in the international system, or between the idea that the EU is a 'civilian power' and that such a power is necessarily a good thing" (Sjursen, 2007: 3-4). Therefore, in order to assess the validity of the norms pursued by the EU it is important to decide first "what kind of standard for 'goodness' is being used and to clarify its legitimacy basis" (Sjursen, 2007: 4).

A more nuanced assessment of the EU's normative nature is provided by N. Tocci who claims that the global role of the EU should be considered in relation to its goals, its internal capabilities (means) and the impact of its actions. However, according to Tocci, by trying to maximize its 'normative power' role, the EU is faced with a dilemma:

"On the one hand, the EU is more likely to pursue normative means when power relations between the EU and a third state are relatively balanced and relations develop within the confines of mutually negotiated agreements. On the other hand, power and particularly relational power seems to be of critical importance to engendering a normative impact given that even the best of intentions may be an insufficient condition of success (Belarus)." (Tocci, 2008: 71)

Besides, it is even more difficult to assert a normative role when the EU itself does not always abide by the norms proclaimed. This happens because member states, like any other international actors, are driven by material interests, like the urge to acquire greater economic leverage or to build military means. According to Tocci, "[s]trengthening

capabilities in these terms could, by contrast, damage the EU's normative role by generating internal EU incentives to bend the law in order to pursue foreign policy goals in the interests of the EU or its member state." (Tocci, 2008: 71). Therefore, a solution could be to "develop further the set of rules and laws that bind EU external behaviour in relation to third states, and link these rules and norms explicitly to the obligations set under international law", as well as to strengthen internal institutional monitoring mechanisms, preventing the member states from breaching these rule and norms (Tocci, 2008: 71).

The argument that the EU is different in a good way from other international actors is present in IR literature since the days of the European Community (EC). F. Duchêne was the first to introduce the notion of 'civilian power' to express the EC's pursuit of the domestication and 'normalisation' of international relations by tackling international problems within the sphere of contractual relations and structures (Duchêne, 1973: 19). He also believed that the lack of common military means, far from being a source of weakness, represented a virtue (Duchêne, 1973: 19). Today, the EU brings a distinctively civilian contribution to the capabilities of the international community in conflict areas around the world. Multi-level governance gives it great leverage in establishing patterns of regional integration and norm diffusion makes it an indispensable ally in the attempt of rebuilding global governance and multilateral cooperation on more solid grounds.

The EU's ambition to influence international relations in an increasingly globalised world transpires from how it projects the pursuit of interests as a global actor. In a Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council the European interest in the age of globalization is defined as a responsibility triggered by the ability to tackle global issues, such as security, climate change, poverty, international migration, and by the tools developed for supporting human rights and promoting effective multilateralism and sustainable development worldwide (European Commission, 2007: 4). Its view of the world and of security at large reflects an assumed mission to change the world in line with the democratic values of justice, peace and equality through diplomatic tools, multilateral dialogue, communication strategies, financial assistance and even knowledge exchange. The influence it hopes to bear on international relations can be obtained by the force of attraction and by the recognition of European values.

Introduced by J.S. Nye Jr. in his theory of the US world leadership, 'soft power'² has been a leitmotif in the conception of the EU's global role in the last decade. Nye talks about three types of resources (culture, political values and foreign policy) which are inherent to understanding 'soft power' and are essential policymaking tools in today's globalised informational society. Considered in the context of the EU's relations with

2 This notion was introduced by Joseph S. Nye Jr. in his work *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (1990) and was recently described as the most successful neologism of the last decades (Nexon, 2009).

its close neighbors 'soft power' can act as an instrument of reconciliation and dialogue between the different cultures and religions, in this case between Christianity and Islamism (Pușcaș, 2010: 134). From the EU's viewpoint, the European Neighborhood Policy has a 'soft power' dimension because it aims at exporting European values, norms and standards in order to create a more democratic and more secure environment in the immediate neighborhood. However, the legitimacy of 'soft power' is not fully acknowledged. According to Hettne and Söderbaum the EU's 'soft power' resembles a kind of "soft imperialism" (Hettne and Söderbaum, 2005) in some parts of the world where the EU is seen as imposing a unilateral vision. The economic sanctions it enforces upon states that fail to respect certain standards in exchange for the financial assistance provided by the EU are considered as forms of coercion and sometimes as threats. Nonetheless, this may be just a matter of perception considering that some political regimes apply double standards in order to receive external support without having to give up authoritarian government tactics. On a more positive note, the EU's 'soft power' is, as one EU official described it, a "force to change" due to "the inspiration of [its] model of integration and shared sovereignty, the magnetism of [its] process of integration and of building increasingly close relations with [its] neighbours, the transformational capacity of [its] experiences in conflict resolution and state-building in complex areas" (Hellenic Foundation, 2007: 7). Whether or not the world is ready to embrace all these things that define the EU identity, Europe's 'soft power' capabilities and the need for a more active role on its part in world affairs cannot be disputed.

However crucial the EU external action may prove in different circumstances, it cannot claim to move things in the right direction and change the world by itself. On the contrary, it needs to reconfirm and reinforce cooperation with its traditional allies across the Atlantic (the United States), but also to work harder at building "truly strategic relationships" with rising powers like India, China and Brazil (Hellenic Foundation, 2007: 7). It also needs to develop more flexible and more reliable instruments for tackling the plethora of existential problems confronting our world today.

It was also J. Nye who raised awareness of the need for a 'smart power' strategy in the US foreign policy, one which can overcome the multiple challenges faced by our international system in the 21st century. According to Nye, 'smart power' is about integrating 'soft' tools, such as diplomacy, development assistance, communications and educational exchanges with 'hard' ones, like economic and military instruments (Armitage and Nye, 2007: 1). A crucial ingredient of a 'smart power' strategy is rebuilding the foundation from which to address global challenges, which is synonym to investing in the "global good". In Nye's opinion, "the main institutional architecture absent today is an effective forum for coordinating global strategic thinking on a set of specific practical challenges"

and he urged America to invest in a new multilateralism, “that provides a range of multilateral options for generating new norms and practical solutions to solve global problems.” (Armitage and Nye, 2007: 34). What is needed actually is an institutionalism that is still based on norms and consensus, but not in the form of the so-called “coalitions of the willing”. According to Nye, formal alliances and partnerships that increase legitimacy and burden sharing while facilitating consultation and interoperability are more appropriate to address unforeseen challenges without the start-up costs of coalition building, provided that America can secure cooperation from its allies (Armitage and Nye, 2007: 32).

It seems that the EU leaders reflected upon this scenario by embracing a similar approach in defining the EU’s role in a globalised world. According to Javier Solana, former Secretary General of the Council and EU Foreign Affairs Representative, the EU needs regional and global partnerships, although this may involve “working with others who, by definition, have their own ideas and interests” because sacrificing short-term interests is beneficial for long-term progress (Ditchley Foundation, 2009). Not in the least, the EU should build a foreign policy fit for the problems of the 21st century: “integrated, wide in scope and geared towards mobilising networks” (Ditchley Foundation, 2009). In this positive note, one would say that the common affinities of the two traditional partners across the Atlantic – the EU and the US – will bring them to cooperate even more in the interest of the “global good”.

Building a complete picture of the EU’s external profile involves also mentioning the negative perceptions attached to it. For instance, the “fortress Europe” concept (Bretherton and Vogler, 2006: 38) has been triggered by some EU practices leading to internal market protectionism, the increased defence of its borders against external threats or the selective eligibility criteria for EU membership. This unflattering image is topped off by a more mythical perception of the “European classical power ‘telling other parts of the world what political, economic and social institutions they should have’” (Telò, 2007: 308).

And yet, with an ability to set strategic goals, to make decisions that bear a real impact on its member states and to influence the international environment by interacting with other actors and creating demand for action, we can conclude that the EU should be recognised as a global actor. Its activism-prone behavior originates in the EU integration history and is based on the intrinsic values which the EU proclaims in all foreign policy actions. Although it lacks the degree of internal unity and political coherence shown by other global players recognised as such, the EU remains unquestionably an original regional polity (Telò, 2007: 304) that disposes of the necessary tools to contribute to the development of a new kind of regionalism and to the emergence of world governance.

The European Security Strategy or how to make Europe more secure and the world a better place

The transformations in the global security paradigm in the 21st century urged the international actors to rethink the agenda of their external action and the means used to achieve it. Adopted at the Brussels European Council in December 2003, the European Security Strategy (ESS) defined the strategic objectives for addressing future security challenges, including multidimensional threats (including terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction), regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime. But in order to achieve those objectives and to become a global security actor the EU needs to develop a security culture as the foundation of a stronger CFSP (Howorth, 2002: 88). The ESS proposed to develop a “strategic culture that fosters early, rapid and when necessary, robust intervention” (European Security Strategy, 2003: 11).

Strategic culture can be defined as a set of values, preferences, expectations, ideas and practices which can be merged into coherent patterns of behavior and provide a specific footprint on strategy (Biava, 2006: 55). In a traditional understanding the notion of “strategy” is linked to the conception of national interest which often presumes the use of military force in order to dominate, form alliances and occupy territories (David, 2000: 27). However, the end of the Cold War reclaimed changes in the strategic culture paradigm and more IR theoreticians (Baldwin, 1995; Buzan et al., 1998; Krause and Williams, 1996; Rojas Aruvena, 2002) agree that security needs to be considered at different levels (economic, human, societal, ecological, cyber etc.) against the background of deterritorialized threats and the increasing presence of non-state actors in the international system. Therefore, an efficient security strategy needs to be open-minded and resilient, reaching out to all the resources available in a timely and constructive manner.

By 2003, the EU had already made progress towards a coherent foreign policy and a more effective crisis management, which the ESS fully acknowledged. However, identifying future potential threats and defining Europe’s new strategic objectives could not remain without consequences in terms of policy implications for the EU. Hence, the operational guidelines set by the ESS reclaimed more active engagement in pursuing strategic objectives, more capabilities to realize the full potential of the EU and more coherent policies. Last but not least, working with closest partners, particularly the United States, through partnerships and with international institutions through multilateral cooperation was considered the only way to deal with common threats and to make the world safer.

The ESS acknowledged the need for more active and more capable action in external operations and thus urged the EU to take greater responsibility by reinforcing its coop-

eration with the United Nations and by considering supporting preventive engagement as a viable option to avoid serious problems in the future. Also, the EU was encouraged to extend the spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention to include political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities. But all these instruments and capabilities have little impact if they lack complementarity and a major challenge is to bring them together and make them serve the same objectives. In this context, the ESS raised awareness of the insufficient coordination of the EU member states in their external activities, pleading for more coherent policies at regional level.

These recommendations made by the ESS were very timely considering that the EU is lacking an integrated approach of its civilian and military capabilities. The long lasting dissensions among member states regarding the creation of a real defence community in Europe have brought major inconveniences to the EU's image abroad. Suffice to say that R. Kagan described the EU as a "post-modern artificial paradise" which owes its existence to the protection offered by the American military arm. The ESS recognises the transatlantic relationship as an indispensable instrument and "a formidable force for good in the world", but aims for an effective and balanced partnership to which the EU can contribute with more capabilities and increased coherence (European Security Strategy, 2003: 13). And yet, in spite of the strong historical, cultural and normative links between the two traditional allies, the different perceptions of the EU and the US regarding their individual interests and responsibilities towards specific parts of the world sometimes create conflicting predispositions for external action. As a sign of openness and strategic thinking, the ESS encouraged the EU to foster strategic partnerships with all those actors who share its goals and values, although naming Russia and China could be nothing more but wishful thinking and a recognition of Europe's economic interests.

In adopting the ESS the EU member states managed to build consensus on ways to achieve a more secure Europe by defining new strategic interests in its external action. Unfortunately, this programmatic document was marked by inconsistencies, reinforced by the EU's failure to translate commitments into action in the following period. C. Hill (2007: 8) thinks that there are solid reasons for this failure: firstly, the ESS seems to have targeted a foreign audience and not the EU citizens who generally oppose the idea of a common security and defence policy; second, the ESS overestimated the EU's capacity to achieve the strategic goals, knowing that member states are still divided on several foreign policy issues and lack the political will in sensitive areas like security and defence.

In the Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy (2008), the European Council examined the implementation of the ESS five years on and made suggestions for improvement in the light of future challenges. The report stated that the global financial crisis and the multiplication of intra-state wars altered the way global

politics work today. According to some authors, the transition to multipolarity came with a revigoration of power politics and with increased pressure on the institutional and normative framework built after the Second World War (Toje, 2010: 172).

Drafted and approved in a tense internal and international environment, soon after the rejection by Ireland of the Treaty of Lisbon, in the aftermath of the South Ossetian conflict, and against the backdrop of the most severe global financial crisis, the report on the ESS tacitly admitted the EU's operational limits in becoming a global strategic actor (Toje, 2010: 178-179). However, in relation to conflict management the report stressed the crucial importance of the civilian instruments which prevail in the EU's external missions: “[d]rawing on a unique range of instruments, [...] [w]e have worked to build human security, by reducing poverty and inequality, promoting good governance and human rights, assisting development and addressing the root causes of conflict and insecurity.” (European Council, 2008: 2). Five years on, the visibility of the European Security and Defence Policy increased significantly due to over 20 missions deployed in response to humanitarian crises in different parts of the world. These low-profile interventions abiding by the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and by the OSCE commitments have carved the distinctive profile of the EU foreign and security policy.

Nevertheless, the Council report expressed concerns that the permanence of the so-called “frozen conflicts” the immediate neighborhood poses multiple challenges. Although the EU acknowledges vested security interests in this area, it needs to reinforce efforts to build stability and good governance. It is reassuring that the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) (2004) and the subsequent Eastern Partnership (2009) opened up a new stage of the relations between the EU and its periphery whose finality is to build “regional integration” (European Council, 2008: 10). V. Pușcaș (2010: 139) optimistically sees the ENP as an example of ‘smart power’ due to a mix of ‘hard’ resources (coercion through economic and diplomatic sanctions) and ‘soft’ influence (attraction through welfare). However, the Council report stated that the European dependence on energy resources originating in this area must be met with “a more unified energy market, with greater inter-connection, particular attention to the most isolated countries and crisis mechanisms to deal with temporary disruption to supply.” (European Council, 2008: 5). In such an unstable environment, the report urged for “continued effort by the EU, together with UN, OSCE, the US and Russia” (European Council, 2008: 10). Yet, apart from urging for sustained effort and full engagement, the report fails to identify clearer guidelines for improving EU action in this particularly strategic region.

Last but not least, supporting international order based on a renewed multilateralism is a firm recommendation made by the Council report on the implementation of the ESS. Nevertheless, A. Toje notices inconsistencies between the EU's self-proclaimed global

actorness ready to share responsibility for global security action (expressed in the *2010 Headline Goal*) and the fact that it doesn't seem to assume any strategic role in the global mechanism of multilateral cooperation (Toje, 2010: 179). Above all, the ESS failed to respond to the expectations that a strategy for "a secure Europe in a better world" normally creates in external stakeholders and risks to remain a mere representation of too big a hat for a so-called "global" actor.

Concluding remarks

The debate around the EU's ambition to be acknowledged as a single voice in global affairs took place against the background of the major changes affecting the international system in the beginning of the 21st century, involving the redistribution of power and the emergence of uncommon threats to global security in its multiple dimensions, particularly human, societal, ecological, energy and cyber security.

The firm commitments of the EU to defending security in a large sense equals an assumed mission to change the world by fighting poverty, underdevelopment and regional conflicts, in line with the fundamental European values and political culture, through diplomacy and political dialogue, communication strategies, humanitarian and development assistance, and by enforcing international law and multilateral institutions. As the EU external action reached a global level, it led to a series of arguments among IR scholars and analysts of the European integration struggling to conceptualize as accurately as possible the EU's potential as a global actor based on empirical observations. Hence, notions like 'civilian power', 'normative power Europe', 'ethical power', 'force for good', 'soft power' and 'fortress Europe' have filled the public discourse in an attempt to determine the real profile of the EU as international subject. As semantically rich and expressive as these concepts may appear, they reveal a lack of consensus regarding the EU's external identity, a situation worsened by the unwillingness of European nations to pool 'hard' resources and capabilities into an EU military arm as their foreign allies would expect them to do. In spite of these setbacks, we agree that the EU's capacity to set strategic goals, to make decisions which affect its external performance and to create expectations for action in many parts of the world fully endorse the recognition of the EU as a global actor.

The adoption of the European Security Strategy was the cornerstone which provided the EU with the necessary criteria to filter its global role by setting firm strategic goals for common external action: the combat of multidimensional threats, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and organized crime, the resolution of regional conflicts and the development of a strategic culture which facilitates proactive

responses and swift interventions are some of the most significant security challenges for any global actor. Taking note of the weaknesses of the EU common foreign and security policy in a context of great uncertainties for the future of the international system, the ESS pleaded for the transformation of the EU into a more active, more capable and more coherent entity who is more prone to work with other actors in the framework of multi-lateral institutions. Yet, in spite of its bold objectives, the implementation of the ESS was marked by incoherencies and hesitant decisions in the following period. Due to the fact that the EU struggled for several years in a row to define a common identity on a clearer, more firm and more engaging legal basis in the form of the Treaty of Lisbon, the implementation of the ESS provisions remained work in progress.

The Treaty of Lisbon reinforced the intergovernmental basis of the EU security and defence policy. For this reason, the EU is expected to remain an eclectic presence whose strategic interests will be negotiated by European powers like France and Germany. Some say that the architecture of the EU makes it more prone to arbitrary decisions and, as such, the EU will remain essentially an egocentric power (Laidi, 2008: 137). As for its normative drive, the EU continues to appear ambivalent to the rest of the world: “more attractive”, because it is not a hard power, and “less convincing, and less credible” because it is not a coercive power (Laidi, 2008: 138). In spite of these contradictory identities the EU’s ‘soft power’ can bring further advantages to the international order in the long run, due to its potential to transform the world peacefully. But, in order to preserve its comparative advantages, the EU will have to mobilize more considerable resources and political will than it does today. Moreover, the EU has to discern between its predisposition for engagement and the imperative need to act. These difficult times require strategies which can guarantee productive actions and efficient resource management. Hence, the EU should decide to act globally only if its involvement does not hinder the achievement of the intended goals and provided that it can secure local support and a firm acceptance of the prerequisites for intervention.

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