THE TIME FOR EU’S COMMON FOREIGN POLICY IS NOW

THE EU’S 2021 FOREIGN POLICY PRIORITIES IN THE EYES OF WORLD-CLASS PRACTITIONERS, EXPERTS AND POLICYMAKERS

GLOBSEC Strategic Brief
Abstract

The world, at present, is rapidly changing, profoundly uncertain and challenged by an array of issues. The international environment, for one, has undergone a global power shift in recent years that has seen democratic values put on the defensive and the liberal economic model endure setbacks. Some global players including the United States have retreated from the multilateral international framework even as others, like China, have sought to augment their global influence. Where does the EU currently stand? What should Europe’s foreign policy priorities be in 2021? And how can the EU optimally secure its objectives?

Constrained by a complicated institutional structure, limited authority and resources and a sluggish decision-making process, the EU is, in fact, struggling to project a cohesive foreign policy voice internationally. While important progress, undoubtedly, has been made on several fronts and should not be ignored, a full-fledged European foreign and security policy remains, for now, a far-off aspiration. The new Commission, nevertheless, is fully aware of the challenges it is going up against. Casting itself in a more geo-political role, the Commission has resolved to ensuring the strategic autonomy of the EU in relation to the US, China and Russia.

In this report, sixteen experts analyse what exactly Europe’s foreign policy priorities should be in 2021 and what the EU should do to bolster its strategic ambitions. It brings together short contributions from distinguished practitioners, experts and policymakers.
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Executive Summary

The outset of this year has been marked by a far from festive mood, the pandemic still holding a tight grip on societies and economies. This crisis comes on the backdrop of wider global geopolitical changes which bode ill for a Europe that is, regrettable, becoming a marginal strategic actor. The EU, a real community of nations, has never been so severely neglected. Britain, for its part, has left the family. China, Russia and Brazil, meanwhile, perceive us as ‘Europe’, not the ‘European Union’. And regional and world powers flogo speaking to EU institutions, instead turning to member states. The term “Global Europe”, unquestionably, reflects more aspiration than reality.

These developments are disappointing given the potential of the European project, a unique ongoing continental experiment that has seen nearly half a billion people peacefully foster prosperity and democratic institutions over half a century. Integration has generally proceeded in fits and starts but over the past three decades, we have learned one matter the hard way: the Monnet method, the conventional approach towards deepening European integration, will likely not succeed in the foreign policy realm. The creation of new institutions and procedures was able to generate positive effects back in the 1950s when cooperation would spill over from one area of integration to another. Projection of power abroad, however, is not as concrete as sectoral coal and steel cooperation. No wonder the technocratic method that has, thus far, been applied to the Common Foreign and Security Policy has come up against formidable obstacles. This observation, notably, does not mean that foreign policy, by definition, can never achieve closer integration in the EU. It only means rather that it will not occur through an institutions-first and politics-later approach. In foreign policy, in other words, it will take much more than the Monnet method to bring about a common approach.

As 2021 finally shakes off a pandemic-induced torpor and normalcy is restored, what should the EU’s five focal points on foreign policy encompass?

1. **Sort out the European project from within.** EU foreign policy will only be as effective and ambitious as EU integration more broadly. To project power abroad, you need to have it in the first place. It would be naïve to assume that internal debates concerning the rule of law and shared values, the finalité of the EU and the limits of solidarity will not affect the bloc’s global clout and standing. This fact sharply underlines the case for holding the Conference on the Future of Europe, which is to be launched by the President of the European Commission. The EU should go back to its roots and use the concept of ‘community’ instead of ‘union’. It will foment a sense of belonging and open a debate on Europe’s values and symbols and what lies beneath them.

2. **The EU should embrace all available tools going beyond the Common Foreign and Security Policy sensu stricto.** EU foreign policy, be it on climate, peace building and development aid, energy, democracy, trade or migration, should all be perceived as part and parcel of “Global Europe”. A policy of ‘normative realism’ could serve as a constructive approach enabling the EU to, for example, pursue its interests through free trade agreements. This will, however, necessitate a change in mindset and a further convergence of the instruments the EU has at its disposal.

3. **Seize once-in-a-generation opportunity.** The Biden administration provides a welcome respite for those pinning for a renewal of transatlantic ties, the cornerstone of Western civilization. There is a long to-do list for partners on both sides of the Atlantic – Iran and NPT, China, Russia, the WTO and trade and the regulation of digital giants. EU-US mutual investment is the real backbone of the transatlantic economy but it has suffered setbacks in recent years. Europeans and Americans could return to negotiations on a free trade agreement, or – as others call it – an ‘economic NATO’. That name is no coincidence. The project has genuine geopolitical value and is finally gaining traction.

Today, despite a new administration in the White House, the contours of a post-American international order are forming. This includes not only its emerging structures but also its risks and threats, all of which are intensifying. For Europe – and for the rest of the world – the pandemic has proven to be a catalyst for far-reaching changes. The crisis has undermined the credibility of many institutions and created a climate of suspicion around institutional reforms. Rebuilding trust presents a considerable challenge that demands member states and EU institutions coordinate their responses. These needs, furthermore, reinforce calls for a “strategic autonomy” that complements rather than replaces the transatlantic bond.

4. **2021 provides, perhaps, the final geopolitical opportunity for Europeans to clarify what kind of relationship they want with key global players including China and Russia and our neighbourhood.** The EU, otherwise, will be a policy-taker, unable to shape events abroad. Foreign policy begins at the doorstep (i.e. the neighbourhood). If the EU is not able to work out what it wants with prospective members and neighbours, it is difficult to envision the EU becoming a superpower globally. The concept of Europe being a ‘transformative power’ is flailing. While the European model is attractive to societies that have no other choice but Europe, the EU is failing to persuade those who have decided on alternative development paths. With respect to countries which contradict universal values and international law, meanwhile, the EU has a powerful and effective tool available in the form of sanctions. Though sanctions can be effective, provided diplomacy on the ground is adept and coordinated with other instruments, it is only a tool and not a goal itself.

5. **Part of the answer on “how to do it” will involve the adoption of flexible arrangements by member states and EU institutions or enhanced cooperation.** One way to provide this possibility would be for member states to step away from the unanimity rule, either formally or functionally. It is not fair to blame European institutions for problems that are the result of the negligence of national governments (i.e. the failure to equip institutions with an adequate mandate and resources).

The EU often finds itself squandering considerable time on its own problems. We can either continue arguing about fish, potatoes, milk and shoring up the banks, watching Europe’s power diminish in the process. Or we can join together and become a global power, one that speaks to both economic and foreign policy and defence concerns. The potential is there within our grasp - if we utilize it.

It is far past time for Europeans to abandon their Europe-centric and inward-looking approach and instead launch a common foreign policy worthy of its name. To start investing properly in their future security, the EU must mature and develop the capacity to defend its own interests. The day is indeed fast approaching when others will be less able and willing to do this for us than they once were.

In foreign policy, it will take much more than the Monnet method to bring about a common approach.
The EU – and the world more generally – is currently facing numerous foreign policy challenges, some of them latent for a long time and many of the consequence of actions or inactions of the past (e.g. climate change and the pandemic). Though not all problems will be easy to solve in the short-term, EU foreign policy officials should, nonetheless, focus on five priority areas in 2021 (not all may, however, be realistic given the timetable).

The first (realistic to achieve) concerns the need to recompose relations with the US on trade, climate, NATO reform and the Iran

The EU should, moreover, deploy foreign policy activities where member states are fervently convinced that common action will prove more successful than individual national efforts.

The normativity and continuity of EU foreign policy should be maintained at a time when two key pillars, Germany and France, face important upcoming elections (Bundestag in September 2021, French Presidency in 2022).

The most important change that 2021 will bring concerns President Joe Biden and the return of the US to transatlantic cooperation and multilateral deals and organisations. This is an opportunity for Europe to forge unity internally and intensify relations with the US and the G7 on important strategic questions.

To overcome the challenges identified above, the EU should intensify its diplomacy and use second track diplomacy by conducting outreach to civil society organisations, promote investments in infrastructure and inclusive education in strategic regions; take a precautionary approach towards introducing economic sanctions in response to political situations in other countries as they may prove to be ineffective and counterproductive.

If the EU wants to bolster its strategic ambition in the world, it should, foremost:

- Strengthen its alliances.
- Prioritize multilateralism.
- Pursue and complete the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), enhance the North Atlantic alliance and balance the effects of Asian integration and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).
- Improve relations with Latin American countries through support for initiatives including on climate change, health and social cohesion.
- Use trade as an instrument for bolstering relations with ASEAN countries, South Korea and Japan. The EU must be present in Asia as part of its moves to rebalance foreign policy.
- The EU must speak to and support Africa. Land grabs and the exploitation of critical minerals, oil and natural resources are a current reality of global geopolitics. Through multilateralism, however, the EU must cooperate with other countries to devise rules to protect populations.

The EU should solve competitive inequality and develop an assertive foreign policy

by Prof. Jordi Bacaria Colom
Professor of Applied Economics, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)

The expansion of China in Europe should be curtailed - "17+1" meetings indeed represent an open intrusion into the internal affairs of the EU. The new US administration, in fact, achieved what the EU has not previously been able to accomplish, successfully persuading some member states from participating at the highest level of a 17+1 meeting with the Chinese President. Major projects of member states with China (e.g. the Budapest-Belgrade railway) should be suspended if they are contrary to or in competition with EU programmes.

On Russia, meanwhile, ‘sticks and carrots’ work. The West will, sooner or later, be faced with swallowing Moscow’s belligerent occupation of Crimea. Russia, nevertheless, should pay a particularly high price for its transgression focused towards, among other topics, promoting human rights and finding a solution to protracted conflicts. In a new détente, some Eastern Partnership projects could be extended to Russia as confidence building gestures (e.g. environmental protection, transport networks, the war on terrorism).

In the Western Balkans, more transparency is needed on future enlargements. EU member states should be provided a road map on the process and candidates should also be presented with clearer scenarios bound to gradual conditionality. Turkey, furthermore, should be provided incentives to encourage the country to cooperate more with the EU and NATO and pull the country away from Russia’s orbit.

EU foreign policy should not merely serve as a facsimile of member state foreign policy. Rather than necessarily addressing the entire world, it should be highly targeted towards select partners, including the most prominent countries and organisations (e.g. ASEAN) and the most pressing global problems (Covid-19, climate change, terrorism etc.).

The EU should, moreover, deploy foreign policy activities where member states are fervently convinced that common action will prove more successful than individual national efforts.

The EU foreign policy should not merely be a facsimile of member state foreign policy but be highly targeted towards select partners, actions and issues

by Dr. Péter Balázs
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The first EU goal should be to recompose relations with the US on trade, climate, NATO reform and the Iran

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The EU should solve competitive inequality and develop an assertive foreign policy
“The EU’s foreign policy priorities need to be grounded in a deeper understanding of global challenges”

by Dr. Rosa Balfour
Director, Carnegie Europe

The international context is so troubled that any list of foreign policy priorities would resemble the Christmas tree that Javier Solana, former EU High Representative for foreign policy, used to complain about. EU disunity has made its foreign policy an aggregation of disjointed national priorities. This process undergone little change over the past twenty years. The precari-ousness of Europe’s future, meanwhile, is apparently not impetus enough to galvanise European capitals to agree on a common agenda.

EU foreign policy priorities for 2021 thus need to be grounded in a deeper understanding of global challenges - now and with which these can be addressed is the next step. The climate crisis and the technologi- cal revolution, in particular, are two developments that will critically shape the future. And they will play out amid three significant and interconnected challenges: the US-China rivalry, the state of democracy and the post-pandemic recovery.

The US-China rivalry, which is politically dividing the world, impinges on all policy areas. The EU’s ambivalence on this issue reflects divisions among member states and misconceived hopes that Europe can be a neutral or equidistant party. Secondly, the state of democracy in Europe and the EU’s inability to prevent its deterioration are a weakness vis-à-vis geopolitical rivalries. These democratic shortcomings reveal Eu-rope’s vulnerabilities, which are, in turn, exploited by actors seeking to further undermine the EU’s global clout, its position in the multilateral system, and the security of its societies. Finally, steering the post-pandemic recovery on both health and the economy will absorb considerable time and energy from political leaders. But it is, nonetheless, crucial that its reach be international and not just focused on Europe.

The EU recovery plan identified the recipe: marry-ing green and digital to make the economy fit for the future. The EU priority should now be to craft its foreign relations around these goals by supporting oth-er countries in this transformative effort. Doing so will require investing resources and expending diplomatic effort towards existing partnerships and alliances. This cooperation can contribute in reformulating institu- tional global governance to make it responsive to the emerging world, pushing back against detractors of democracy and making our societies more resilient.

In the more pragmatic world of policy, this translates into five priorities for 2021:

- **Reboot the US relationship.** The EU cannot reject Washington’s call to discuss the challenge posed by China. The EU need not entirely align itself with US views on China but it needs to prove itself trust-worthy and reliable if it wants to be listened to in Washington. Rather than join a race to the bottom, European capitals can play a role in de-escalating tensions where possible. To be credible, this will, however, necessitate standing firm on principles.

- **Counter geopolitics through inclusive multilateralism and openness.** The US return to multilateral institutions provides a once in a generation op-portunity to reform multilateralism to make it more effective – designing/crafting global solutions to global problems - and more inclusive – involving multiple state and non-state actors from all corners of the world.

- **Invest in democracy at home and abroad** by strengthening institutions and practices to counter authoritarianism and the democratic pitfalls of the technological revolution.

- **Support other countries and actors in addressing the post-pandemic recovery** and greening their economies.

- **Address the multitude of foreign policy challenges on the EU’s doorstep** including, among others, Libya, Turkey and Russia. Through the above lens-es – working with partners, defusing geopolitical tensions, investing in diplomacy and bolstering the commitment to universal principles – Europe can succeed.

The climate crisis and the technological revolution are two developments that will critically shape the future.

“A “constitutional moment” needed to bolster the EU’s international strategic ambitions”

by Dr. Emil Brix
Director of the Diplomatic Academy in Vienna

Why is EU foreign policy taking centre stage during on-going discussions on the geopolitical position and role of the European Union (EU)? This is, in fact, a direct consequence of both real and perceived changes in unstable geopolitical power relations. The notion that the bloc needs to learn “the language of power” to defend its interests and those of its member states on the global stage has indeed become commonplace in the EU. Josep Borrell, High Representative/Vice-President for foreign affairs and security policy, in particular, has advocated for this type of approach in EU relations with third countries and in addressing global challeng-es (from migration to climate change to cyber threats).

The EU’s global strength and influence, however, are now in jeopardy amid the continued economic rise of China, the departure of the UK from the EU and grow-ing confrontations with Russia. Despite these head-winds, wake-up calls agitating for greater “strategic autonomy” of the EU are not yet prevalent enough to create the necessary momentum for large-scale reform of governance. Without an EU “constitutional moment”, it is unlikely that foreign policy activities can decisively bolster international strategic ambitions. Further piecemeal engineering, therefore, remains the most realistic approach to foreign policy priorities in 2021. This would entail:

- Using the window of opportunity of the renewed US commitment to multilateral institutions to de-velop common EU proposals for a more up-to-date and “effective multilateralism”.

- Continuing to make headway on a comprehen-sive EU-China strategy.

- Not relenting on the ambition to establish a com-mon EU-migration policy.

- Re-activating the accession process of the West-e rn Balkans.

- Bolstering all other EU policy areas in making better use of the major global strengths of the EU, including trade and the setting of standards, on a wider scale. This, in fact, ranks as the most ambitious and important priority.
A strong global player, finally, clearly envisions its place on the global stage. There is a need for a new and more equal partnership with the US and a clear understanding of how the bloc fits into a US-China-EU triangle. The EU must also resolve its future relations with the UK, devise a more stringent policy towards Russia and Turkey that, nevertheless, keeps the door open for more constructive dialogue and reinvent its relationship with Africa.

A global player must perceive itself as one and adopt a language and demeanor that reflect this stance. A global player, moreover, sees the world as it is, not as the one it would like it to be. The EU, rightly, prides itself on being a strong promoter of multilateralism and a defender of values. And it should certainly continue pressing these priorities. But if other players are choosing not to play that game, then the EU must adapt and give itself the means to defend its interests in a more hard-headed way.

A global player also develops its own strategic autonomy, conferring it the possibility to help shape the world, defend its interests and make its own choices as to its place in the world. The EU should, notably, not orient itself towards protectionism or autarky, which would be folly on the part of the largest trading bloc in the world and an actor deeply integrated in the world. It is also paramount that the concept be defined in a broad and comprehensive manner: this is not just about foreign policy and security but also trade, the internal market, the economy, the digital world, climate change and energy policy.

The EU, rightly, prides itself on being a strong promoter of multilateralism and a defender of values. And it should certainly continue pressing these priorities.
“EU bolstering of global strategic ambitions rests on part deeper integration and part smart combination of tools already at its disposal”

by Stefan Füle
former European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

The biggest challenge, I believe, is that ambitions of ours and expectations of others about our global role are not matched with instruments and resources at our disposal. The most important task for the EEAS (High Representative) in 2021 will be, therefore, to continue its evolution towards becoming an effective EU external policy tool in close interaction and cooperation with other EU institutions and member states (already possible for example through closer and deeper coordination and interaction between the EEAS and the European Commission).

There are other priorities for the EU in 2021. The EU, secondly, should reach out towards the new US Administration with a bold agenda aimed at protecting and promoting a democratic and accountable multilateral system. To deliver on EU needs and ambitions, thirdly, the EU should make an extra effort to ensure that the UK remains our primary and indispensable ally. A fourth priority concerns the EU accelerating and deepening the integration of countries in its neighbourhood in the EU common market and other policy areas. Fifth, the EU should use the pandemic and post-pandemic backdrop as an opportunity for creating strategic alliances with different regions and countries on the basis of the EU green recovery policy. In addition to that, whenever feasible and desirable, the EU should be able to pragmatically disconnect the political (EEAS) and technical (EC) aspects of external policy (for example focusing on the EU-EAEU working relationship and technical (EC) aspects of external policy (for example, whenever feasible and desirable, the EU should be an opportunity for creating strategic alliances with the different regions and countries on the basis of the EU green recovery policy). In addition to that, whenever feasible and desirable, the EU should be able to pragmatically disconnect the political (EEAS) and technical (EC) aspects of external policy.

While the above-mentioned priorities are attainable, there are also other internal challenges with which the EU must cope if it is to realize its goals. One of them is to improve the EU crisis management and to overcome institutional “contradiction”. While EU leaders, notably, hold collective responsibility for EU crisis management, the task of holding these leaders accountable falls exclusively on respective national electorates. Another internal challenge is undergirded by the failure of some member states to deliver fully on shared values and democratic principles.

Externally, EU foreign policy officials must confront disinformation campaigns sanctioned and promoted by some EU “partners” and new forms of interference that are generally originating from the same sources. The promotion of competing models of multilateralism and governance, moreover, remains a formidable challenge. These are the new “battlegrounds” which we should not underestimate.

A further deepening of EU integration presents one feasible roadmap for how the EU could bring forth a more coherent common foreign policy over the long term. Bolstering the legitimacy of the decision-making model and advancing the “integration” of the EEAS and external policies associated with the European Commission are plausible options. Enhancing the credibility of both the European Commission and the EEAS will also be vital. This entails rendering the Commission less and the EEAS more political.

While the EU needs to strengthen its capacity to become a serious “geopolitical” player, it will ultimately lose the “game” if we do not combine it with a more proactive stance in defending fundamental freedoms, dignity, rule of law and democracy throughout the world.

“The EU can forget about projection of its soft power globally if it doesn’t beef up its internal enforcement of principles and revise its concept of hard power”

by Roland Freudenstein
Head of Research and Policy Director of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES)

Amid the defining conflict of the era between democracy and authoritarianism, the primary challenge for the entire decade ahead will be to save liberal democracy. EU rivalries with Russia under Putin and China under Xi, in this vein, feature prominently. In both cases, this competition is often cast as ‘geopolitical’ but is, in reality, systemic, pertaining to the ways in which the different polities are structured. If Russia and China were free and open societies, our differences would become entirely manageable. The same goes for medium size powers including Turkey and Iran. It is, nevertheless, apparent that the EU cannot prevail in this struggle, in all its complicated facets, without (1) allies, (2) the internal enforcement of its fundamental principles, (3) an improvement in its defence and (4) development of a new dynamism.

A Transatlantic Renewal, therefore, is urgently necessary. The EU, unfortunately, has already complicated matters through, for example, an investment deal with China’s resolute to continue Nordstream 2. The EU, in this regard, is sacrificing long term strategic interests for short term economic gain. If the overarching challenge is correctly identified, though, the EU will be able to find common ground with the new administration on confronting systemic threats arising from authoritarian powers. Europe, consequently, will need to shoulder more of the security burden, demonstrate a willingness to confront the Chinese Communist Party more visibly and respect US domestic economic interests in any future transatlantic trade deal.

We can, additionally, forget about the much-hyped EU soft power role globally if we fail to beef up our internal enforcement of principles including on rule of law.

One last point: On all these challenges, my own country, Germany, the EU’s largest and wealthiest member state, holds special responsibility. And on most of these issues, from taking a firm stand against the Kremlin and the CCP to advancing a serious approach on defence and resilience, its performance has been sub-optimal. The new German government coming in after the elections in September 2021 would be prudent to grasp the opportunity to, at long last, rise to the occasion.
The EU’s Russia policy (hopefully developed in coordination with the US) should be targeted towards resisting Vladimir Putin’s aggression, stabilizing relations and finding space for cooperation wherever feasible. The positive side of the agenda should not come at the expense of European security including, for example, energy security or Europe’s eastern neighbors (e.g., Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia). EU policy, finally, should prioritize outreach to Russian civil society including pro-democracy activists.

The EU must deal with (and work with the US and UK and other democracies) to deal with external challenges emerging from authoritarian powers (Russia, China), failed states, and malign non-state actors (especially in the broader Middle East), and transnational threats (climate change, the pandemic). At the same time, key democracies tackle their respective internal challenges – including economic and social distress and the political divisions they fuel – moreover, must further be addressed. Democracies need to recover their confidence and, most of all, show that they can deliver.

The EU should also reflect on how to optimally develop its foreign and security policy towards the Biden presidency. This includes an emphasis on those issues where the EU does not appear to see eye to eye with Washington. The Iranian nuclear deal (where the standoff continues), the relationship with China (EU openness versus a continued stern US stance) and the longstanding Israel-Palestine question, now following the Abraham Accords, are all paramount.

On Libya, the EU should concentrate more energy into solving the conflict, with the new transitional government recently assuming office and faced with the task of guiding the divided country towards December elections. On Turkey, the EU should find a way to curtail its escalating confrontation. This could begin foremost on issues where Turkey is open to dialogue including energy, migration or Libya.

The EU finally, should showcase its support for multilateralism and the G20 in particular. The bloc should strive to set up a clear-cut strategy – on issues ranging from vaccination to digital transformation to debt relief – and take concrete steps to scale-up its ability to deliver at multilateral fora.

When it comes to the challenges that constrain the EU’s foreign policy’s ambitions, both internal and external problems can be noted. On the internal side, the first problem is structural: the continued disunity and strained relations between EU member states. The second internal challenge is pandemic-related. The EU’s turn to managing domestic problems like healthcare and the post-pandemic economic recovery has put a spotlight on longstanding tensions between member states. Externally, the rising US-China rivalry is increasingly pressing the EU to take sides. It is getting ever more challenging for the EU and member states to act as “mediators” and “bridges”. The effect is that foreign policy has become more polarized and risks driving another wedge between EU countries.

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The EU has the power to become global actor only incrementally

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The top issues that EU foreign policy officials should focus on in 2021 are all interconnected and will depend on a vibrant EU-US alliance.

The EU must recognize its potential to lead on key global issues

by Dr. Alina Polyakova
President and CEO of the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)

The top issues that EU foreign policy officials should focus on in 2021 are all interconnected and will depend on a vibrant EU-US alliance.

The development of an autonomous EU foreign policy, which can be achieved by eliminating the unanimity requirement of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), and the enactment of a robust increase in external action funding, enabling the EU to become a key pillar of the multilateral global order, should be central focal points in 2021.

The EU should further aim to enhance EU integration in defense and security and hasten the European production of military equipment. These developments, notably, should proceed through cooperation with NATO and without duplicating processes. An EU role in creating “European economic champions” and EU leadership on the digital economy and AI would also be prudent if European companies are to compete with global corporate giants. The EU, at the same time, should not surrender its status as a regulatory power and leader on personal data protection and the setting of standards and parameters for the economy of the future. The EU, finally, should continue its work on decarbonization and the promotion of “green” policies to secure European leadership on safeguarding the planet’s future. The pursuit of the above objectives, however, can and should happen only in coordination with the US.

The EU is currently confronted with two major internal challenges. The first concerns growing “regionalization” that comes at the expense of the European project (e.g. fragile unity among member states and a lack of agreement on the primary common risks and threats facing the bloc). This obstacle is further coupled with perceptions that the EU is constrained by relatively weak leadership. The second, meanwhile, pertains to the drift towards stronger internal opposition to liberal democracy. Some member states (e.g. Hungary and Poland) have indicated a willingness to challenge the European project and others appear to be striving for a leadership role on their own terms (France and Germany). Another risk, furthermore, concerns the creation of a “two-speed Europe”. The upcoming change of guard in Germany will be critically important on this point.

Three paramount external challenges can be noted. Firstly, a new wave of immigration is likely around the corner. The issue of 5G connectivity and infrastructure in Europe, secondly, remain pressing against the backdrop of China’s aggressive posture. Russia, finally, continues to pose a challenge. Every attempt at “re-starting” cooperation evokes the impression of weakness on the part of the West. And there is growing Russian contempt towards Western interests in East-European security and the Middle East. The EU has been pushed out of Libya, Syria, the South Caucasus and sub-Saharan Africa. Diplomatic talk of a restart, meanwhile, will not transform the EU from being merely a spectator to a principal actor. Paradoxically, a more confrontational attitude towards Russia on certain files may produce better results than incessantly making goodwill gestures.

Overcoming these numerous challenges will need to begin in the EU and will rest on increasing the “connectivity” of the European project between North and South and East and West. The rule of law conditional- ity mechanism needs to be applied based on performance and compliance. Despite some sniping, no one genuinely shares misgivings on the importance of the transatlantic bond. Any rejection of the societal and historical compatibility between Europe and the US would represent a long-term blunder as would clinging to the illusion that the EU can replicate the capabilities and resources of national governments.

The EU foreign policy officials should focus on in 2021 are all interconnected and will depend on a vibrant EU-US alliance.

The development of an autonomous EU foreign policy can be achieved by eliminating the unanimity and by increasing funding in external action.

“One step at a time: towards an autonomous EU foreign policy”
by Elena Poptodorov
Ambassador (ret.), Vice President of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria

The EU is currently confronted with two major internal challenges. The first concerns growing “regionalization” that comes at the expense of the European project (e.g. fragile unity among member states and a lack of agreement on the primary common risks and threats
“The EU should start paying far more attention to existential issues in its immediate neighbourhood”

by Dušan Reljić
Head of Brussels Office, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP)

First, the EU should aim to re-establish a regular political dialogue with the US built on trust. There are numerous possible joint points of interest: placing the world economy on track to overcome the effects of the pandemic; rolling back the stilling effects of the climate crisis; stepping up efforts to alleviate poverty and improve global public health; promoting a multilateral system based on the rule of law.

Second, the EU should move more swiftly on achieving the finalité of the enlargement of the EU. This entails the specification of precise dates and mechanisms to bring the southeast European Six (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Albania and Serbia with Kosovo) into the EU. This is the only region where the EU still can bring into play consider- able political appeal and transformational power.

Third, the EU should champion its green deal ambitions. Environmental degradation and climate change do not stop at Schengen borders. The EU, consequently, should come up with bolder topical programmes and funding in its neighbourhood – from the Maghreb to the Levant to Eastern Europe.

The EU, finally, should establish a framework for legal migration into the aging demographic space of the EU. At the same time, the member states should provide all young citizens and residents of the EU with a guarantee that they will have full access to education and a first job opportunity.

The greatest internal challenge concerning the EU foreign policy agenda involves doing away with assumptions that there is a path back to neoliberal thinking. The EU should rather do its best to find a new concept of political economy that at the same time can prevent new collapses and bureaucratic suffocation.

When it comes to external challenges, the EU must overcome the ideological presumption that EU member states can export their political model and culture to the rest of the world. The crumbling of ideas, therefore, for the EU is, without sacrificing its own character and values, identify a modus vivendi with systemic rivals, such as Russia and China, which pursue oppressive “political capitalism”. Branko Milanović, the Serbian-American economist, offers a persuasive analysis of such economic and political structures in his latest book: Capitalism, alone: The Future of the System That Rules the World, Harvard University Press 2020.

The central problem for the EU remains the fact that the democratic deficit of the EU has not yet vanished. Particularistic notions in member states, especially the most powerful ones, often further undermine EU policies. The EU can only become effective on the global stage if societies come to see EU institutions as equally democratic and legitimate to their national parliaments and governments. However, it is also possible that this will never be achieved, leaving the EU an auxiliary and less efficient actor.

If the EU wants to bolster its strategic ambition in the world, it should confine itself to achieving realistic goals as outlined above. This entails an end to daydreaming about tweaking the ear of Putin or Xi and turning instead to existential issues that are overwhelming societies in its immediate neighbourhood: poverty, the lack of access to education, healthcare, unemployment and autocratic oppression. The EU is prosperous and maintains a position of power in international trade and finance. It should put these tools to good use with an emphasis on its neighbourhood.

“To bolster its ambition on the global stage, the EU should first clearly define what its ambition is”

by Prof. Erzebet N. Rózsa
Professor, National University of Public Service and the Institute of World Economy, Hungary

The EU is generally losing relevance as a global actor and arguably should no longer be called one at all. According to the realistic school of international relations, the EU, in fact, has probably never deserved the global actor title. Yet, the bloc’s “global actorness” is still relevant in terms of its normative power – both its ability to attract and repel.

There are, furthermore, valid questions concerning the economic-financial-humanitarian donor capability of the EU and the relevance of some EU (or now non-EU) members – the UK and France – in this international order including, for example, in the UN Security Council.

The EU, nonetheless, possesses the unique ability and credibility to mediate conflicts, a capability that was particularly illustrated by the Trump administration. Questions, however, remain concerning whether the EU will prove willing/capable of maintaining this credibility, particularly if the “normative” role of Europe is again to be relied on and emphasized.

But is the EU still the normative power it perceives itself to be? Or is there going to be a division of labour within the EU regarding the “normative” role? Regardless of the path the EU takes, it should focus on nurturing its relations with the US against the backdrop of a Biden administration that has signaled an interest in returning to multilateralism.

The EU, moreover, should exercise its soft power and mediation skills in its neighbourhood. It is here where the EU functions, in regional terms, as a “global actor”, especially in the Mediterranean. The greatest challenge will be posed by conflicts on the southern-eastern shore.

The Global Strategy, launched in 2016, also holds an uncertain future. It is not presently clear if EU leadership will pursue it or other – not any less important – issues (e. g. climate change).

There are, meanwhile, numerous items on the international agenda where the EU could contribute. The Iran nuclear issue is a case in point. As the only success story of EU diplomacy, a successful return to the JCPOA could enhance EU credibility (the announced EU mediated negotiations in February this year already point in this direction). EU credibility will also be on the line if and when the Review Conference for the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) convenes (it was postponed from last spring to this year).

The EU will also be faced with, besides responding to post-Brexit aftershocks, numerous pending questions: for example, how the bloc should proceed with EU integration including prospective members and the ever-greener debate on further and deeper integration versus a “Europe of nations”. Migration (both its humanitarian and political dimensions) also remains a major issue. What if Turkey, for example, conditions the continuation of its EU migration deal on promises of EU accession? It is worth recalling that President Erdoğan once designated 2023, the 100th anniversary of the country’s founding, as a deadline.

To overcome its immense challenges, the EU will need to invest time and resources in facilitating coordination with the Biden administration. Making effective use of the political distance brought on by the Trump administration, however, could be used to project a more independent EU foreign policy. Maintaining a credible mediating role will be vital to addressing all the above challenges and to the status of the EU as a global actor.

The EU is prosperous and maintains a position of power in international trade and finance. It should put these tools to good use with an emphasis on its neighbourhood.

The EU, to bolster its ambitions globally, should clearly define what its ambitions are – internally first and then externally. Delineating the extent of integration intended will be paramount.
The Time for EU’s Common Foreign Policy is Now

by Pierre Vimont
Ambassador of France, Senior Associate Researcher at Carnegie Europe, first Executive Secretary General of the EEAS

Conversations on the future of EU foreign policy frequently turn to criticism of EU institutions for their lack of geopolitical vision. Europe, as the narrative goes, has the toolbox but lacks the strategy. This conclusion, in turn, implies a need for the EU to devise and apply bold strategic plans to numerous ongoing developments including open conflicts in neighbouring areas (Ukraine, Libya, Syria), a rekindled international order (“make multilateralism great again”) and a reset of the transatlantic partnership.

Are geopolitics the missing link in European foreign policy? More precisely, is the strategic void, so obvious for all to see, the reason behind Europe’s fragile diplomacy or is it only a symptom of a deeper fault line? After all, an EU Global Strategy was adopted more than four years ago. Current discussions between member states targeted towards defining pressing security threats (the strategic compass process), meanwhile, could mobilize a welcomed burgeoning strategic culture over the upcoming year. The ongoing narrative on the importance of strategic autonomy and the need for a more assertive European sovereignty, furthermore, appear to indicate a genuine awareness of present EU vulnerabilities.

Yet strong reservations over ambitious goals have been aired by numerous EU member states, standing as a reminder that the main obstacle to reaching the strategic goalpost rests on a change in mindset. Indeed, foreign policy continues to be marked by a profound mentality gap between European governments. This gulf, running deep into the identity crisis the EU has been embroiled in from its start, has not yet been bridged.

For many EU countries, the bloc is essentially considered an economic player with only limited stakes in foreign policy. In their eyes, European diplomacy remains a coordinating process, set up primarily to avoid embarrassing overlaps or blunders between EU members. The notion of Europe as a global power runs against the vision of a Union immune from power politics that many member states still favour. For them, a strategic agenda bent on genuine European sovereignty induces flavours of constant transatlantic feud and risks growing tensions with third countries. In a nutshell, it raises the EU flag too far away from their vision of Europe’s natural playground as a provider of humanitarian assistance, a leader in free trade and a staunch supporter of multilateralism.

Can there be a mentality shift soon? Probably not but the need to overcome this gap makes it a paramount priority for the years to come. Through patient conversation between EU members, exemplified in the strategic compass exercise, but mostly through concrete action and increased agility and swiftness, the EU can kickstart a new brand of European diplomacy. In crisis areas, when major challenges to EU security unfold, the bloc may need to resort to more flexibility with core groups of members leading the way with the support and presence of Josep Borrell (like the EU3+1 format for the JCPOA negotiations). To bolster the European strategic mindset, the next step remains to act by all means necessary and demonstrate EU ambition concretely on the ground.

“Translating EU’s global ambition into action requires greater political and economic cohesion”
by Hans Dietmar Schweisgut
Ambassador (ret.), Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe

It will, above all, be vital for the EU to maintain a united approach on the Covid 19 pandemic and successfully implement its economic recovery package. This is a prerequisite for the EU to establish the credibility necessary to provide leadership on global health cooperation and climate change and take the lead on bolstering global multilateral governance.

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“The need to bridge the mentality gap between EU member states on the bloc’s foreign policy”