GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE: ARE WE READY FOR IT?

WHAT AND HOW OF EU FOREIGN POLICY IN 2022

The Insights Report

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The GLOBSEC Global Europe Initiative aims to develop actionable and practical policy recommendations that will contribute to EU coherence and effectiveness in its external action. A central focus concerns revisiting (once) internal policy areas that have now developed global dimensions, and the ways in which they can become better linked to the foreign policy goals of the Union. The overarching goal of the Initiative is to contribute to the geopolitical ambition of the European Commission to ensure that the EU becomes stronger in the world.

GEOPE – “Geopolitical Europe: are the EU member-states ready for it?” – is an international project seeking to propose feasible paths for compromises and coalition-building between the EU member-states towards a more coherent EU Common Foreign and Security policy. It is supported by Jean Monnet Activities of the EU’s Erasmus+ Programme.

The GLOBSEC Policy Institute is a policy-oriented think-tank analysing policy and the international environment. It focuses on research which is relevant to decision-makers, business leaders and all concerned citizens. The Institute wants to make an impact so that the values of the GLOBSEC organisation – liberal and democratic order in the transatlantic world – are deeply embedded in the agenda of governments.

Abstract

Citizens are currently debating their priorities regarding Europe’s global role within the framework of the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) and governments are developing the first ever EU’s Strategic Compass, a common security-threat assessment. GLOBSEC, against this backdrop, has launched the Global Europe Initiative that aims at developing actionable and practical policy recommendation on how to add to EU coherence to the EU’s external action. For the purposes of this particular publication, we have brought together world class academics, practitioners and experts to share their perspectives on EU foreign policy in 2022.

This GLOBSEC Insights Report aims also to contribute with some interesting inputs on the what and the how of EU foreign policy, put forward by the EU High Representative in a blog post in October 2021. In short, this report touches upon the following questions:

1. What should the EU’s substantive policy priorities be in 2022 in terms of geographic and thematic terms?
2. What are the new priorities that the EU must put greater emphasis on?
3. How can the EU become more effective in its decision-making to take swifter decisions?
4. Can the EU do better in managing the linkages between the internal and external dimensions of European policies?
5. What are practical recommendations for national and EU decision-makers on the future development of EU foreign policy?

These reflections also form part of the GLOBSEC international project, GEOPE – “Geopolitical Europe: are the EU member-states ready for it?”, supported by the Jean Monnet Activitites of the EU’s Erasmus+ Programme. The project seeks to propose feasible paths for compromise and coalition-building between EU member states to foster a more coherent Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).
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Executive Summary

The outset of this past year was marked by a far from festive atmosphere. The pandemic continued to hold a tight grip on societies and economies in the European Union (EU) and across the world. The long ago proclaimed ‘post pandemic’ world has indeed still yet to emerge.

As we transition into 2022, the strategic environment in which the European Union operates appears to be – for some experts – even more complex than any from recent memory. The EU is facing increasing geopolitical and economic competition, the “weaponisation” of interdependencies, and potentially escalating conflict dynamics close to its borders and further afield. The world consequently has overall become more competitive and insecure, with there being more that divides countries than unites them. Yet several examples of multilateral cooperation, including the OECD global minimum tax agreement, the COVAX Facility and the Glasgow Climate Pact struck at the COP26 summit, underscore reasons for optimism.

Notable progress has been forged on technology, taxation, trade, mobility and security in the Washington-Brussels dialogue. But the “seize the once-in-a-generation opportunity” call to renew transatlantic ties, a recommendation put forward in the first edition of the collaborative insight report on EU foreign policy priorities in 2021, is still far from being met. While Washington recognises the benefit of cooperation with the EU in addressing climate change, China and the digital transformation, it continues to pursue its own foreign policy objectives related to other key strategic issues. The withdrawal from Afghanistan and the new AUKUS agreement undermine this pattern. The EU and its largest military powers, therefore, cannot take their role in security matters beyond the European theatre for granted.

As 2022 finally shakes off a pandemic-induced torpor and normalcy is restored, what should the EU’s focal points on foreign policy include?

When it comes to the EU’s geo-related foreign policy priorities, hardly anyone disputes the fact that the EU needs to engage and cooperate with its preferred actors and strategic rivals. Building up the bloc’s strategic capacities and increasing Europe’s responsible use of security tools within the Transatlantic Alliance will provide the EU further freedom to act. To accomplish this, core EU foreign policy priorities should be incorporated into the bloc’s relations with key countries and regions. But it is the EU’s ability to be a constructive and effective player in its neighbourhood that is a precondition to any ambition that Europe might aspire to at a global level.

A first pragmatic step in this direction would involve adopting a common strategy policy towards Russia. The EU, by its nature, is a potential Eastern Partnership and its enlargement policy to providing targeted support to pro-European forces. The bloc, thirdly, would be prudent to revive Western Balkan interest in Europe and overcome relationship fatigue. A final recommendation would see the EU invest in a mutually beneficial and productive relationship with the UK. By fostering opportunities for low-key structured cooperation between the EU and UK on foreign policy issues, a productive relationship can be both re-established and further reinforced.

In turning to the EU’s thematic foreign policy priorities, defence and security appear to be at top of the minds of our contributors. Concerning defence policy, the EU should capitalize on the unfilled potential of EU-NATO cooperation. This platform could become an effective vehicle for agreeing on a strategic division of labour, avoiding duplications, and making effective use of existing tools that have been employed only at limited scale. On the security front, meanwhile, the EU should prioritise its citizens and member states who presently face hybrid threats and attacks. The enhancement of situational awareness, societal resilience and the capabilities of the EU and its member states to counter and deter adverse operations are particularly important. The EU Strategic Compass (despite its possible shortcomings) should be first and foremost seen as an opportunity to enhance European security and the ability of the bloc to defend its interests. The emphasis must now shift, however, to implementation and the generation of tangible results in capabilities. Much needed political will is also needed to address old and new security threats in Europe and beyond. While acting on defence and security, the EU should also invest in building citizen support for this agenda. The transparent framing of defence and security goals is crucial to providing the certainty and assurances necessary to achieve member state and citizen support. The attainment of defence and security capabilities alone misses the point.

Regarding new priorities that the EU needs to concentrate on more, two were particularly singled out. One pertains to the “low politics” focal point for the Transatlantic agenda. While initiatives like the EU-US Trade and Technology Council are laudable, a new focal point emphasizing middle class well-being on both sides of the Atlantic would be a bold step in the formulation of a long term vision for transatlantic relations. The substance of these interactions, significantly, would revolve largely around networking and policy learning rather than contentious questions about burden-sharing and/or rewards. The heartlands initiative, in this vein, has the potential to bring the transatlantic relationship closer to ordinary citizens in a way that traditional agenda items like security and trade have been unable to. A second focal point concerns internal challenges to the rule of law that constitute a drain on the EU’s external legitimacy. The EU has little credibility as a defender of universal rule of law and democratic values when it cannot guarantee those same values for all its citizens. Resolving internal rule of law matters is, therefore, also a crucial foreign policy issue - serious and effective global actors now need to approach foreign policy and external action in a cross-cutting manner that accounts for the external consequences of internal developments.

There is a general understanding among both experts and academics that to be more effective in decision-making and take swifter decisions, the EU should consider moving beyond the unanimity requirement that characterises most Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) decisions. To become a true leader, Europeans need to streamline its 27 singular powers into one. Brussels, otherwise, will continue to punch below its weight. But, of course, this is not a simple task. Unanimity is, in fact, required to move a designated area from unanimous decision making to the ordinary legislative procedure. And any decisions with military implications, notably, will continue to demand unanimity. Where unanimity is not achieved, however, differentiated integration mechanisms should be explored to further the strategic autonomy agenda both internally and with relevant EU partners.

As in recent years, the external dimensions of EU internal policies (such as climate, energy and environmental policies, health and migration) have significantly grown in importance. Improved management of the internal-external nexus should be a particular foreign policy priority for the EU. A lack of strategic integration herein undermines EU external effectiveness and jeopardizes internal goals. Some suggestions for improvements include harnessing the ‘Brussels effect’ by designing internal policies based on foresight that consciously accounts for their potential effects on third parties, bolstering coordination within sectoral policies by promoting intensified coordination between the member states and, finally, strengthening strategic reflection across external policies.

The EU is weakest in the areas related to the “high politics” of traditional foreign policy but strongest in areas relevant to contemporary foreign policy. It is a trading and regulatory power, the world’s biggest development donor and a strong force in climate diplomacy. Further synergies in the EU internal and external policies nexus can be achieved if the bloc projects itself as an external action leader rather than a foreign policy laggard.
Geopolitical Europe: Are We Ready for It?

“Transforming the Industrial Heartlands in the US and Europe: A “Low Politics” Focal Point for the Transatlantic Agenda”

by Jeffrey J. Anderson
Professor, School of Foreign Service and the Department of Government, Georgetown University

Since January 2021, the quest for a revitalized transatlantic partnership has been taken up in earnest by leaders on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet efforts to restore and revitalize US-European relations have been and will be halting and painstaking, not simply owing to the complexity of the common challenges but also because of new domestic political constraints. In Europe, public opinion is warier of US global leadership and more inclined to hedge against the possible return of the America First agenda. At the same time, the Biden Administration must navigate an electorate that is far more skeptical of the benefits of the traditional postwar US foreign policy priorities. In short, leaders on both sides of the Atlantic face far less forgiving domestic landscapes as they seek to repair the damage inflicted on the transatlantic relationship by the Trump Administration.

These harsh new domestic realities in the United States and Europe have clearly registered among political elites. The Biden Administration’s emphasis on a foreign policy for the middle class is clear acknowledgment of the tighter domestic field of maneuver in Europe, where the theme of security for ordinary citizens runs through all of the major initiatives undertaken by the European Union since the onset in 2009 of the long, multi-dimensional polycrisis. But as many astute observers of foreign affairs have pointed out, conducting foreign policy in close coordination with allies “and” in a manner that is clearly tied to domestic economic renewal will not be easy.

Historically, the transatlantic agenda has focused on high politics issues. What is now needed is to include significant issues that are directly connected to citizen well-being.

What might this look like? The heartland regions in the US and Europe have much to learn from each other. In Europe, long experience with place-based initiatives like “smart specialization” and “community ownership funds” is of great relevance to American local and regional actors. Similarly, US strengths in regional technology and innovation clusters and enhancing the role of regional universities provide attractive models for emulation in Europe. The goal should be to create support frameworks that bring together local, regional, and national/supranational actors from both sides of the Atlantic to share both the positive and the negative in their parallel yet in many ways common experiences, thereby facilitating the exchange of best practice across the Atlantic.

A common focus on the challenge of the industrial heartlands would be win-win for the transatlantic partners because the substance of interactions would revolve largely around networking and policy learning, not contentious questions of burden-sharing or who gets what. The heartlands initiative could bring the transatlantic relationship closer to ordinary citizens in a way that traditional agenda items like security and trade have not. If the long-term vision is a transatlantic agenda to include significant issues that are directly connected to citizen well-being, the heartlands would be win-win for the transatlantic partnership.


“The EU’s Strategic Compass should point clearly and unambiguously”

by Zdeněk Beránek
Director, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy

The EU’s defense of its core interests and values must be discussed against the backdrop of broader debates concerning EU Strategic Autonomy and role realignments between Euro-Atlantic allies and partners. The EU capacity to act autonomously and elevate its global posture has garnered particular emphasis. While these are prudent and legitimate ambitions, we ought to put considerably more focus on enhancing our ability to defend our interests and values against a vociferous US and Russian challenge.

The most imminent task is to agree on a strategic division of labor between the EU and its member states and its main partners – NATO and the United States.

The EU’s Strategic Compass is a key tool for strategic communication and must therefore be clear in all areas.

The EU has recently acknowledged and the bloc’s central partners and allies not clearly defined either. And no distinction is made between multilateral partners including the UN, AU, OSCE and NATO. The bloc’s list of partner countries and priority regions, seemingly encompassing the entire globe, is also ambiguous. The “technical” sections of the document, paradoxically, are more unequivocal. But the Compass is a key tool for strategic communication and must therefore be clear in all areas.

The problems in the draft, notably, reflect the underlying political dynamics at play including a lack of consensus among member states. Ambitions for greater European strategic autonomy, of which the Strategic Compass is just one manifestation, represent either long-term dream or dread depending on the member state. Regardless to which camp one belongs, we should first and foremost see this newfound purpose as an opportunity to enhance European security and the capacity of the bloc to defend our interests.

To achieve this, we must be reasonable and realistic. If we only focus on multinational structures, the EU and NATO are truly formidable and ideally positioned to divide up labor in the Euro-Atlantic region. Debate concerning EU-NATO cooperation has been ongoing for decades. But the present combination of intensifying global power competition, growing European ambitions and Washington’s heightened attention towards the Indo-Pacific region provides new impetus. EU-NATO cooperation could potentially become the right platform to agree on a strategic division of labor that avoids duplications. And the Strategic Compass, which prudently emphasizes the important role the EU can play in the areas of resilience, hybrid threats, cybersecurity and disinformation, could prove a useful tool.

The focus on defense capabilities and technologies is equally appropriate. The most important contribution, however, pertains to the realization that Europeans need a common strategic vision and that our actions need greater coherence and a common sense of purpose. NATO, on the other hand, has combat-proven military capabilities and command and control structures. Any EU ambitions in this area must be sensible and complementary to NATO’s existing potential. What Europe truly lacks is the willingness to invest in its defense rather than novel structures that duplicate existing ones. The Berlin Plus arrangement, which enables EU missions to use NATO command capabilities, must consequently be mentioned. The instrument is currently only being used on a limited scale largely due to political constraints but underscores the unfilled potential of EU-NATO cooperation.

The EU should use the Strategic Compass to devise a clear strategy, shared by all its member states, that will reflect its real strengths and weaknesses and genuinely contribute to the distribution of competences between partners in the Euro-Atlantic area. If it succeeds, the EU’s ability to defend our core values and interests will be substantially bolstered despite an ever more challenging global context.
“To be true leader on global stage, the EU needs to streamline the 27 singular powers into one”

by Katarína Cséfalvayová
Director, Institute for Central Europe

We are living in a dynamically changing world – for several years now hardly an international politics discussion could begin without hearing this phrase. Yet this adage has never been truer than it is today. The global order is indeed witnessing shifts in power structures, with new powers emerging and traditional ones sending up signs of fatigue following their extended stints as leaders of the free world. The United States, for example, appears to be surrendering its role on the global stage, weakening the position of the West more broadly. This vacated space, however, is generally being quickly filled by powers that tend not to share the same values and, sometimes, unfortunately not even basic respect for human life.

The EU also needs to be actively present wherever peace and democracy are at stake and as a partner to all whose rights are being violated. Turning a blind eye to human rights violations in the pursuit of pragmatic goals should no longer be allowed. Neither should European member states stand on the opposing sides of conflicts like we witnessed in Libya. The EU should act as one unit and resist being torn apart by any of its member states, be it Germany, France, Italy or others.

European foreign policy, finally, needs to be unified, quick, proactive and effective. Procedural reforms are urgent and will be necessary, with progress in one area resting on similar progress in other focal points. While it is difficult for member states to surrender part of their sovereignty and accept and support common decisions no matter disagreements, it is our best course of action and, in fact, our only option. We must stop seeing the EU as a collection of national interests unable to reach beyond the smallest common denominator and rather seek out one unique common interest that we will defend even if that means some sacrifices. To become a true leader, we need, in other words, to streamline 27 singular powers into one. Failure will entail not only that we continue to punch below our weight but that we will be onlookers, rather than actors, in shaping the future of humanity and our own.

The EU has the potential and means to be the “exporter of values” but European foreign policy must reflect the values we believe in (…).

Though the US has promised a renewed international presence, Washington has restricted this focus largely to China including their economic and political rivalries. The EU, nonetheless, has not always entirely used the relevant features of EU foreign policy, harder tools if leading by example and normative power are still the backbone of the bloc’s diplomatic power. Even in making the most of the EU’s economic prowess and realistic objectives.

EU foreign policy, secondly, should prioritise the security of its citizens and member states currently endangered by hybrid threats and attacks. The “weaponisation” of migrants, information flows and cyber and other domains have been increasingly identified as threats and acted upon. Yet enhancing the situational awareness, societal resilience and capabilities of the EU and its member states to counter and deter adverse operations needs to be prioritised.

The member states, thirdly, should form a unitary front bolstering the European Commission and the EEAS in making the most of the EU’s economic prowess and regulatory power. These attributes constitute the backbone of the bloc’s diplomatic power. Even if leading by example and normative power are still relevant features of EU foreign policy, harder tools are increasingly needed to respond to intensifying strategic competition in the global political economy. External policies that are backed up by a balanced utilisation of softer and harder tools will enable the

“Five enablers that could help the EU to re-emerge as a proactive actor on global stage”

by Juha Jokela
Programme Director, Finnish Institute of International Affairs (FIIFA)

The Covid-19 pandemic, from its outset, has witnessed the acceleration of key trends in world politics and economics. Given the depth of global interdependencies, the failure of major powers to develop joint responses to the pandemic speaks volumes about the current state of international cooperation in an era of intensifying strategic competition. Experts have also been concerned that the pandemic could escalate present conflicts and ignite new ones with ramifications for regional and global security. The European Union, in 2022, will face increasing geopolitical and economic competition, the “weaponisation” of interdependencies, and potentially escalating conflict dynamics close to its borders and afar.

Against this backdrop, the Union should first prioritize addressing conflicts in its neighbourhood and beyond. The Western Balkans, eastern neighbourhood, Mediterranean, and sub-Saharan Africa require urgent attention and complete deployment of the EU’s comprehensive toolbox including conflict prevention, military and civilian operations, staunch diplomacy, economic incentives, and sanctions (if needed). These actions should be guided by longer term strategies and realistic objectives.

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The member states, thirdly, should form a unitary front bolstering the European Commission and the EEAS in making the most of the EU’s economic prowess and regulatory power. These attributes constitute the backbone of the bloc’s diplomatic power. Even if leading by example and normative power are still relevant features of EU foreign policy, harder tools are increasingly needed to respond to intensifying strategic competition in the global political economy. External policies that are backed up by a balanced utilisation of softer and harder tools will enable the

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The past year has underscored both the tremendous potential of transatlantic cooperation and the many challenges present. Adoption of a proactive approach and the political will to act and the development of capabilities would be assets if the EU is to optimally use the window of opportunity opened by the Biden administration. This especially pertains to advancing a joint agenda promoting and defending shared values and interests. Washington recognises the benefits that comes through cooperation with the EU in addressing climate change, China and the digital transformation. Yet the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the establishment of the AUKUS alliance - forged behind France and the EU’s backs - suggest that the EU and its largest military powers cannot take their role in security matters for granted beyond the European theatre.

The Strategic Compass, set to be adopted in March 2022 and delineate the direction of the EU’s security and defence policy, should consequently be a fourth priority. The focus must now shift to its implementation and the generation of tangible results in capabilities. The bloc also needs the political will to address old and new security threats in Europe and beyond.
Finally, and most importantly, the EU and its member states particularly cannot shy away from addressing notable challenges underpinning the efficacy of its foreign policy decision-making processes. The need to work on a common strategic culture is a daunting task but the changing external environment has opened some avenues to making headway. This reorientation should be facilitated through the use of constructive abstention and (over time) qualified majority voting. In terms of EU operations, Article 44 of the Lisbon Treaty enables willing and capable members to more swiftly develop and execute EU operations.

In sum, five enablers that could help the EU to re-emerge as a proactive actor on global stage are as follow:

- Address conflicts close to EU’s borders and beyond
- Enhance capabilities in identifying and address hybrid threats
- Make most out of EU’s economic and regulative power
- Focus on swift implementation of EU’s Strategic Compass on security and defence policy
- Improve efficacy of foreign policy decision making

The EU ambition to achieve strategic autonomy is a logical and necessary response to the long-term shift of US priorities towards Asia. However, it should be reframed from being about “emancipation from the US” towards the actual EU ability to act on challenges where a disengaged US may no longer provide sufficient support. The most obvious threat is Russia, consistent in gradually re-claiming the EU’s Eastern Neighbourhood, destabilising the Western Balkans and instigating division within and between EU Member States.

On hard security challenges, including the Russian military build-up along the Ukrainian and Belarusian borders, the EU will be strongest if concord is preserved within NATO. But European leaders would rightly ask themselves what capabilities their countries have for deterring (or responding to) possible further invasion into Ukraine. European defence against Russia’s new hypersonic weapons and cyberattacks should also be reviewed (in the appropriate fora). In developing civil-military capabilities under the new Strategic Compass, the EU could draw useful lessons from the 2020 war over Nagorno Karabakh that was effectively settled by Russia and Turkey alone.

Russia also exploits non-military vulnerabilities. Take Belarus – it took the EU four months to adopt effective measures to end the air transit of Middle Eastern migrants into the country. During the Moldovan gas crisis of October 2021, the EU was able to provide budget support, but no reverse flows of gas could be organised. Moreover, Gazprom was able to further drive up EU energy prices by draining gas reserves in several EU countries. Partial EU dependence on Russian gas as a transition fuel is inevitable for another two decades and Nord Stream 2 is already constructed, but EU strategic autonomy could be improved at least by accelerating the green transition and getting energy reserves under better control.

The EU has been losing ground even in the main domains for which it had designed the Eastern Partnership, namely political association and economic integration. Georgia, once a promising frontrunner, is perhaps the greatest disappointment. The country has witnessed an oligarchic regime, with strong Orthodox ties, cement its power since 2012. The pro-Russian turn was initially covered up by maintaining pro-European rhetoric. The guise was definitively lost in 2021: continued takeover of the judiciary, violent repression of liberal protests and manipulation of elections has proven more important to the regime than the disbursement of EU macro-financial assistance or the rebuilding of political dialogue, despite Charles Michel’s mediation. Russian exports are regaining their foothold on the Georgian market and the EU will soon face here a challenge not too different from Belarus: how to support sustainable development and a civil society adhering to EU values, without unwittingly bolstering the budget of an authoritarian regime.

Meanwhile at the UN, Russia has proposed to abolish the Office of the High Representative and terminate the EUFOR mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina. This move has emboldened Bosnian Serb separatists to pursue withdrawal from state institutions, testing the power of EU diplomacy. EU leaders obviously need to maintain open communication channels with Moscow. But it would be a sad irony if the stated pursuit of EU strategic autonomy continued to be coupled with neglect of EU interest to contain Russian expansion. Moscow remains resolute in its backing of Europe’s far-right and spreading of disinformation.

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To sum up EU priorities should be:

- Adopt a solid common strategy policy towards Russia which implies containing Russian expansion, maintaining communication with Moscow, heeding Northern and Eastern Member States’ experience/interests and forging partnership in its Russia’s policy and closely cooperate with the US and UK, which pursue similar interests in this area.
- Revitalize the Eastern Partnership and the EU enlargement policy by providing targeted support to pro-European forces. Refine EU strategies and financial tools so that they support sustainable development and civil society attached to EU values. Attach stricter political conditionality to EU support.
- Accelerate EU decision making process.

The following five actions would abet this process:

- Where unanimity is not achieved, differentiated integration mechanisms should be explored to further strengthen strategic autonomy.
- Secure member state buy-in for all dimensions of external action from technology and trade to health and energy.
- Expand the notion of EU’s strategic autonomy should be placed on its divisive security and defence components.
- Politically engage with the US to secure a joint commitment to European strategic autonomy. Both actors will not agree on a single set of priorities pertaining to other world powers (particularly China). But both Washington and Brussels can agree that a more reliable and capable EU will bolster the advancement of shared Western interests concerning Beijing and Moscow.
- Continue to advocate for strategic autonomy that is open and collaborative, entailing that it not be autarchic or self-interested and that it seeks to protect a rules-based international order.
- The United States, meanwhile, is gradually coming to recognize the complementarity benefits that a stronger EU security and defence can provide. A US pivot to Asia, notably, began under the Obama administration. Trump, for his part, implemented a foreign policy approach aimed at confronting China. And Biden has demonstrated that, when it comes to defending Washington’s interests, key players are also to be found beyond traditional allies.

The AUKUS pact, a setback to French priorities and interests in the Indo-Pacific, was seen as further confirmation of these shifting alliances. Australia and the US share concerns towards China’s increasingly assertive and power-fuelled foreign policy. And the UK, a former EU member, is perceived as a more reliable source of nuclear-powered submarines and other critical AI and technological infrastructure.

Against a 21st century geopolitical backdrop defined by the rise of China and increasing rivalry between Washington and Beijing (from trade to security to technology), the US and EU must advance a shared global agenda. The EU’s interests will lie in ensuring that the new emerging global order becomes, at minimum, a world of three (US-China-EU) and not just of two (US-China). The bloc, consequently, must add value to its partnership with Washington. The US, however, too will benefit from a united West that draws on the complementarity of the many visions, policies, and priorities present (including some that may not necessarily coincide).

The EU has already taken crucial steps to expand the role of strategic autonomy as a driving force of its foreign policy. The EU Global Strategy of 2016, a rather realist-oriented document for an increasingly “connected, contested and complex” world, indeed is premised on the idea that the EU needs to do more to promote stability and protect global public goods.

The AUKUS agreement, recent trade wars, technological competition, and the pandemic have all reinforced the need for the EU to establish a more robust foreign policy toolbox. Key among the EU’s instruments remains strategic autonomy – this comes despite the excessive spotlight
The EU is weakest in the areas related to the “high politics” of traditional foreign policy but strong in areas relevant to modern foreign policy. It is a trading and regulatory power, the world’s biggest debtor but also the necessary supporter of EU citizens. Just having defence and security capability misses the point. We have battlegrounds, for example, that have never been used. More important is being clear about the purpose of such capability and generating the support to use it within transparent limits.

Internal challenges to the rule of law are a drain on the EU’s external legitimacy. Action on resolving rule of law issues within the EU can enhance the EU’s external position. The EU has little credibility as a defender of universal rule of law values when it cannot guarantee those same values to all its citizens. Resolving internal rule of law issues is a crucial foreign policy issue and highlights the necessity for a serious and effective global actor to approach foreign policy or external action in this cross-cutting way where internal developments have external consequences.

Enlargement, particularly related to the Western Balkans, is another area where internal dynamics are affecting external legitimacy. Fatigue among some member states and competition from other geo-political actors has resulted in accession moving from being a long-term inevitability to long-term long-shot. The EU’s structural power in the Balkans and the wider neighbourhood encouraged those states to align (to differing degrees and at differing speeds) with EU norms because of the ultimate pull of accession. As EU membership becomes more realistic, the Union’s influence has weakened. The Union is an attractive neighbour when its door is open. As a closed shop we may hold on to the perception of security but our ability to shape events outside our borders diminishes and ultimately creates more insecurity.

Finally, there is the issue of one other neighbour. Geography and history tie the EU and the United Kingdom together. A mutually beneficial, productive relationship is in the interests of both sides. While the relationship is characterised by mistrust and acrimony now, ways to re-establish trust will have to be found. At a global level the EU and UK are natural allies on climate diplomacy, human rights and political economy. These alliances continue at different levels across multilateral institutions. Creating opportunities for low-key structured cooperation between the EU and the UK on foreign policy issues is one way of beginning to re-establish and embed a productive relationship.

The EU faces a seemingly more complex strategic backdrop as it heads into 2022. Brexit’s completion, for example, has opened a climate of legal and political mistrust between the EU and the United Kingdom. And the AU-KUS pact has reversed the diplomatic rapprochement between the bloc and the US and further eroded the relationships between some EU capitals and London. Important progress has been forged in dialogue with Washington (on technology, taxation, trade, mobility and security). But the lofty expectations Europeans hold regarding President Biden are largely unreal at present, with many believing that this moment represents a mere interlude in American history.

The uneven management of the pandemic and delays to getting western economies back to normal have wreaked havoc on the post-Covid calendar and the management of expectations across European democracies. Eratic healthcare decisions have, furthermore, contributed to variance in both vaccine uptake and the economic recovery and hampered political stability. The recent energy crisis, moreover, coincides with an exponential increase in commodity prices and global logistics disruptions. This dynamic underlines the constraints placed on Europe on account of its reliance on Russia, the incipience of the common market, the absence of diversified suppliers and routes and the tephid pace of the transition towards cleaner energy across the continent within a dysfunctional, unbalanced and politically disparate setting.

These developments also come as Chancellor Merkel leaves office with the new German government expected to advance more ambitious European policies, a more pronounced outlook on the EU’s role in the world, and a more assertive voice in its relationship with both Russia and China. Scepticism towards strategic Chinese investments in Europe is also growing (technology, infrastructure, the financial sector, healthcare, agribusiness and energy) including particularly in Paris and in Rome. The two governments indeed have rounded out the year by signing a bilateral agreement for enhanced cooperation (the Quirinale Treaty), a pact aiming to strategically rebalance influence in Europe in light of Germany’s ongoing political transition. And whereas President Macron will face an important electoral test next spring, Prime Minister Draghi has emerged as a source of stability in Italy. Europe’s elected leaders will also see the popularity of Putin post-Tokyo progressive policies put to the test at the end of January. And electorates in Hungary and Slovenia, respectively, will decide whether to dismiss illiberal governments led by Orban and Jansa in the spring.

Democracy in Europe faces tremendous challenges, some posed by authoritarian pressures from the outside and others the result of the EU’s own negligence in matters related to internal nationalist shifts. It is difficult to envision a future for the EU that does not depend on it safeguarding the wellbeing of its democracies. This is truly the great challenge faced today: preserving the quality of European democracies even as they endure cannibalisation attempts from growing anti-democratic movements, political parties and networks.

It is up to decision-makers, therefore, to do everything in their power to overcome the pandemic through widespread vaccination. This includes more generously supporting poorer neighbouring regions through, for example, prompt financial assistance that covers vaccination costs. This aid can contribute to reducing the likelihood that new strains arise. Europe should also endeavour to consolidate the economic recovery without turning away from its commitments to the digital and environmental transitions. Consistent reductions in inequality and the reinforcement of people’s social sense of belonging within democratic systems and post-European parties must also be pursued. If we manage to fulfil this ambitious roadmap in 2022, we will be able to better calibrate our geopolitical influence towards achieving globalisation that is more regulated and international trade attuned to European standards. Accomplishments may also include the sustained resolution of security crises and the stability of supply and energy chains.

If the EU pushes forward in 2022 (while fulfilling its social, economic and health goals), it will be in a better position to re-emerge as a more powerful player within the framework of strategic competition currently defining international politics. Failure in 2022, however, will mean jeopardising the future of Europe.

The EU should start believing and projecting itself as an external action leader rather than a foreign policy laggard

by Noelle O’Connell
CEO, European Movement Ireland

The starting point for an effective and coherent EU foreign policy lies in recognising, as we have already done in numerous areas, that shared sovereignty does not equal lost sovereignty. The logical progression, consequently, is to consider moving beyond the unanimity requirement that characterises most Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) decisions. Progress can be achieved with it in the current treaties, particularly through the so-called Paserreale clauses. But it is not a simple task. Unanimity is, in fact, required to move a designated area from unanimous decision making to the Ordinary Legislative Procedure. And any decisions with military implications, notably, would continue to demand unanimity. However, acknowledging the constraining effects of unanimity in some areas and considering changes that could have a real impact on foreign policy coherence and capability should be up for discussion.

The term foreign policy itself is potentially problematic because of how the EU is structured. Conceptually the EU would be better served by moving beyond foreign policy and towards external action. The EU is weakest in the areas related to the “high politics” of traditional foreign policy but strong in areas relevant to modern foreign policy. It must also be pursued. If we manage to fulfil this ambitious roadmap in 2022, we will be able to better calibrate our geopolitical influence towards achieving globalisation that is more regulated and international trade attuned to European standards. Accomplishments may also include the sustained resolution of security crises and the stability of supply and energy chains.

The truly great challenge faced today by the EU is to preserve the quality of European democracies.

Delivering on internal policies will be key if the EU is to re-emerge as a more powerful player on the global stage

by Bernardo Pires de Lima
Associate Fellow, Portuguese Institute of International Relations and Political Advisor to the President of the Portuguese Republic

The EU faces a seemingly more complex strategic backdrop as it heads into 2022. Brexit’s completion, for example, has opened a climate of legal and political mistrust between the EU and the United Kingdom. And the AU-KUS pact has reversed the diplomatic rapprochement between the bloc and the US and further eroded the relationships between some EU capitals and London. Important progress has been forged in dialogue with Washington (on technology, taxation, trade, mobility and security). But the lofty expectations Europeans hold regarding President Biden are largely unreal at present, with many believing that this moment represents a mere interlude in American history.

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“Enhancing the EU’s external effectiveness by better managing the nexus between internal and external policies”

by Simon Schunz

Prof. Dr., EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies, College of Europe

In recent years, the external dimensions of the EU’s internal policies have assumed greater importance. These issues touch upon highly dynamic areas - often crisis-driven - that Europeans care fervently about: citizens consistently rank health, climate/environment, energy, migration and internal security among their 12 major concerns according to Eurobarometer surveys. The EU has responded to this public sentiment by bolstering associated internal policies and reinforcing their external dimensions. To address unprecedented migratory flows and the pandemic, for example, the bloc has overhauled its internal and external migration and health policies. The European Green Deal (EGD), similarly, elevates climate, energy and environmental policies as central priorities. The EU, nonetheless, has failed to entirely reap the rewards that come through the interlinking of internal and external action. In the future, its external effectiveness stands to gain from better managing this internal-external nexus.

Better managing the internal-external nexus should be a principal foreign policy priority for the EU.

The successful intertwining of internal and external dimensions of policies is not only integral to attaining internal aims but “many of Europe’s internal policy dimensions” is nonetheless, has largely failed to entirely reap the rewards that come through the interlinking of internal and external action. In the future, its external effectiveness stands to gain from better managing this internal-external nexus.

Harnessing the ‘Brussels effect’: the EU, via this mechanism, impacts the world through its legal and policy acquis, without deliberate external action. This low-cost approach towards wielding external influence should be harnessed more by designing internal policies based on foresight that consciously accounts for their potential effects on third parties. This should become an essential aspect of impact assessments, similar to the way the EU is going about devising its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

Bolstering coordination within sectoral policies: internal and external action in the same or closely intertwined policy domains (e.g. climate and energy) must be consistently aligned by prioritizing EU aims and selecting appropriate means to fulfill them. To promote intensified coordination between the member states, an EXCO-inspired mechanism should be created in Council Working Parties tasked with the external dimensions of EU policies. It could involve appointing ‘policy correspondents’ charged with assessing, based on a list of criteria, whether external policy initiatives take due account of the internal-external nexus. This format will ensure the matter is not overlooked during discussions involving internal policy experts and external action-focused diplomats.

Strategizing strategic reflection across external policies: established EU external policies, especially pertaining to the neighbourhood, trade and international partnerships, and their (budgetary) means should be more consistently deployed to support internal goals. To oversee this effort, positions similar to the EU’s ‘Chief Trade Enforcement Officer’, whose task is among others to ensure the enactment of sustainable development provisions in trade agreements, could be created.

Better managing the internal-external nexus should be a principal foreign policy priority for the EU. Whereas considerable political capital is currently invested in becoming a ‘strategically autonomous’ geopolitical actor backed by fortified hard power, it is through more joined-up action in soft power areas of ever-increasing importance that the EU can – at lower cost – play its existing strengths.

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“Most substantive EU foreign policy priority should be rule of law and democracy”

by Ivan Vejvoda

Acting Rector I Permanent Fellow, Institute for Human Sciences

Amid a rising number of external and internal challenges that have confronted the EU and its member states, the current EU Commission pronounced its ambitions to be geopolitical as it transitioned into office in November 2019. The changing climate indeed warranted a novel, more assertive approach from one of the strongest economic blocs in the world, with the EU understanding that it needs to develop policies, instruments and tools that will enable it to be strategically autonomous. Despite a robust transatlantic link, the EU has found itself needing to stand alone in a variety of situations, especially during Trump’s term in office and amid the rise of China.

Strategic autonomy should be complementary to the joint transatlantic efforts and policies in strengthening the rules-based order internationally and democratic institutions and values domestically.

The most substantive policy priority should be the rule of law and democracy. These are the pillars underpinning the development of robust societies – plurality, legality and publicly (a free and open public sphere) are funda-

mental to fostering civic virtue and freedom. The defense and bolstering of democratic institutions are, consequently, key to the survival of the EU. This internal challenge should be continuously addressed if the EU is to project its geoeconomic and geopolitical power abroad.

Geeconomics and geopolitics indeed now represent two sides of the same coin even though the EU has not, as of yet, been assertive enough in deploying its power in these areas.

Beyond the domestic arena, China and Russia should be of key concern in political, economic and security terms. The EU faces demographic headwinds (the bloc’s population is projected to represent only 4% of the world population in the not too distant future). Now enveloped by a developing G2 world, the EU should project itself more vigorously by reinforcing its core values and buttressing a global, multilateral environment. Considerably greater European cooperation between member states, however, will be needed if this is to be achieved. Only by working closely together can the EU and its individual member states rise to the present challenges facing the world.

Apart from the general global environment and pressing need for greater technological development in key sectors including, among others, artificial intelligence and quantum computing, the Middle East and the Western Balkans should be two focal points.

Since the 2011 Arab Spring, the EU has been negligent towards its own immediate and long term security interests in the Middle East. Although drafted as a Mediterranean policy plank, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) was established in 2008 and has certainly yielded numerous concrete mutual benefits. But the EU failure to sufficiently engage itself diplomatically or otherwise in the Syrian conflict conveyed the impression that the bloc was a mere onlooker to the events and consequences that ensued. The Middle East stands in the immediate neighborhood of the EU – a considerably more comprehensive strategic approach must be defined and implemented to promote EU engagement. The Western Balkans, for its part, is the inner courtyard of the EU. Completely surrounded by EU and NATO member states, the integration of this last part of core geographic Europe is crucial for the credibility of the EU project.

The EU’s lack of capacity to draw these countries closer to its doorstep has opened space for Russian and Chinese involvement in a variety of ways not congruent with the long-term interests of the EU or these countries and their societies. Progress on compliance with EU standards, democratic reform and the strengthening of rule of law, nevertheless, principally benefits the countries of the Western Balkans. But it is the EU, bolstered by its geoeconomic tools and geopolitical foresight, that can help bring this region into its fold, at minimum for the sake of its own security and stability.

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