

Going Global, Targeting the Home Front – the EU’s Global Strategy

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When the European Council mandated the EU’s High Representative Federica Mogherini to prepare a new strategy on foreign and security policy in June 2015, a British referendum on EU membership seemed to be lightyears away for European leaders, let alone the possibility of a Brexit. In the past year, Mogherini and her staff at the European External Action Service (EEAS) made a huge effort to extensively consult EU Member States, the European institutions, think tanks and European civil society in order to identify the shared foreign policy interests of all Member States and to outline a new, updated strategic vision for the EU’s global role.

However, timing couldn’t have been worse. Just a few days before Mogherini wanted to present her freshly drafted Global Strategy (EUGS) proudly to the European Council, the decision of British citizens to leave the EU suddenly jeopardised all efforts made by her. The political drama that unfolded as a result of the British referendum seemed to steal the show from her and her lighthouse project. All the attention of European leaders, media and the European public focused solely on the consequences of Brexit and the helpless attempts on both sides of the Channel to cope with the mess that followed.

For a brief moment, Mogherini considered postponing the release, fearing that the strategy paper would get lost in the political Brexit turmoil but then decided rightly to stick to her plan. On the one hand, she realised that the Brexit debate will not go away anytime soon – thus, by postponing the presentation, she would have risked that the Global Strategy would have never been published any time in the near future as the Union would have simply been too absorbed with other problems. On the other hand, Mogherini was aware of the urgent need to adapt the EU’s foreign and security strategy to the new challenges of a fragile and insecure world. It helps to understand how important such an update is when recalling once again the first sentences of its predecessor, the [European Security Strategy \(ESS\)](#) from 2003: ‘Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free. The violence of the first half of the 20th Century has given way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history.’ In comparison, the [Global Strategy](#) starts with the following much gloomier words: ‘We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat. Our European project, which has brought unprecedented peace, prosperity and democracy, is being questioned.’ The contrast is striking and reveals the radical changes the EU’s wider neighbourhood underwent in the past decade.

Still, critics might question whether a strategic vision for the EU’s foreign and security policy without the UK will actually matter. Indeed, the UK – a nuclear power with a permanent seat in the UN Security Council – has been a key driver of EU foreign and security policy. With such a crucial military and diplomatic power leaving, the EU’s reputation and its credibility as an international actor might be hampered. Yet, at the same time, the UK has continuously blocked EU initiatives in the field of foreign and security policy that aimed at closer cooperation between Member States. Notwithstanding the UK’s important role in EU foreign and security policy, Mogherini’s argument that no Member State can cope with these global challenges alone is to the point and at the same time a wake-up call. [‘This is no time for uncertainty: our Union needs a Strategy’](#) she writes in her foreword to the Global Strategy. Indeed, there is no alternative to unity and common action.

There is also another, more symbolic reason why it was very important that Mogherini decided to ignore those voices that called for postponing the release date: the Global Strategy bears the potential to provide reassuring answers to crucial challenges in international affairs to dissatisfied and insecure citizens who are more and more sceptical about EU integration. The document sets a standard against which EU action in the field of foreign and security policy in the future will have to be measured. Thus the Global Strategy might help to raise new awareness among citizens about the necessity of the European project and might help to regain their trust.

Indeed, the first thing you note when reading the document is that it pays reference to immediate citizens' interests. While the ESS mainly described a strategic outlook that aimed at a 'better world', the Global Strategy sends the simple but clear message to EU citizens that it is first about the protection of the EU and its internal security. Against the backdrop of recent terrorist attacks on European soil in Paris, Brussels, Nice, Rouen or Ansbach this is a crucial message to send to Europeans.

Recently published surveys also highlight that taking measures to guarantee security, promote prosperity and safeguard democracies resonates well with EU citizens. They indicate that European citizens expect the EU to take a more active role in global affairs: in a [survey conducted by the Pew Research Center](#) in ten EU Member States that account for 80 percent of the EU population, 74 percent of interviewees want the EU to take a more active role in world affairs than it does today. Particularly in those Member States in which the majority or a large part of interviewees responded that their country has lost global influence over the past ten years (Greece (65%); Italy (52%); Spain (50%); France (46%)), the wish for a more engaged EU was expressed most prominently. A [recent Eurobarometer survey](#) that looked at the perceptions and expectations of Europeans regarding EU action in specific policy fields confirms these findings. While 71 percent want the EU to engage more in the protection of its external borders, 68 percent expect greater engagement in the field of democracy promotion. In the field of security and defence policy, another 66 percent would love to see a more proactive EU.

Brexit has undeniably demonstrated that the chronic fatigue and dissatisfaction of European citizens with the EU has become a concrete threat to the existence of the European project. The best way to reconnect citizens with the EU and to regain trust is through concrete projects that are beneficial for every EU citizen and that highlight why it is worth protecting what European integration achieved so far. The figures above highlight that the Global Strategy can be one pillar in fulfilling this task as it provides enough substance by contributing to stronger EU foreign policy cohesion to meet citizens' expectations.

However, notwithstanding the loaded European political agenda, in the following months Mogherini will have to work hard to develop a tailor-made communication campaign to disseminate the key messages of the Global Strategy to the different target groups and the wider public. More importantly, as usual, unpacking the diverse elements of European foreign and security policy as well as their concrete implementation will be key. Even though the strategy will be reviewed annually, re-drafted every five years and many sub-strategies will emerge from it, Member State commitment will decide whether the strategy can unfold its full potential or whether it will end up being another paper tiger.