

THE EU'S GLOBAL STRATEGY: THREE QUOTATIONS

By Robert Cooper

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The EU is currently developing its new Global Strategy.¹ Robert Cooper argues that strategy is needed but that the machinery that implements it is no less important. Drawing on his experience and the work done so far on the Global Strategy, he calls for a cultural shift to put local expertise and initiative at the centre of policy making.

The need for a strategy

Winston Churchill: *"Gentlemen, we have run out of money. Now we must think."*²

The European Union has not run out of money, but it has run out of luck. We have dealt with the greatest threat - ourselves - through the creation of NATO and the EU, but this is not enough. Enlargement has widened the zone of stability and good government, but it has not done so in quite the miraculous fashion we first thought; the full miracle will take longer. The Balkans are not at war, but they are not at peace either.

Further, beyond our borders the problems are worse. To our East are mostly dysfunctional states, weakened by the low intensity conflicts that Russia nurtures. If we ever needed proof that Russia's goals were the opposite of ours here it is: while we dreamed, naively perhaps, of a ring of peaceful, well governed states around us, Russia's ambition seems to be ensuring that its neighbours are weakened by conflict and poor government. How this benefits Russia is hard to understand; it certainly does not benefit us. Perhaps that is the point.

Events to the South and Southeast show it does not suffice to end our own wars: other people's wars can produce a crisis for Europe too. We had learned that once before in the Balkans, but seem to have forgotten. The Syrian civil war, a tragedy on a scale not seen since World War II, is now in its sixth year and has become a threat to Europe's own stability. We should not assume that Syria is the only country in the Middle East where a civil war is possible.

Finally, and most importantly, the last sixteen years have shown the United States has experienced unprecedented swings of mood and policy. President Obama has concluded that interventions in the Middle East have done more harm than good, and that Russia is a nasty regional problem rather than a global threat. It is hard to disagree. We should also be alarmed that President Obama and Donald Trump agree that NATO is an organisation for European freeloaders. The EU will have to take more responsibility. The first step is to

think. That is what the Global Strategy is for.

The need for organisation

Norman Schwarzkopf: *"Amateurs think strategy; professionals think logistics."*³

There is nothing wrong with thinking about strategy. For a ship like the EU, with twenty-eight potential captains, it is important to have a shared sense of direction. Nevertheless, knowing where you want to go is useless unless you have the means to take you there. Military operations fail if logistics fail. An EU strategy will mean nothing unless it has the organisation to implement it. The assessment presented to the Council last summer gives a sense of the problems the EU faces externally.⁴ The world it describes —complex, contested and connected— is more diverse than anything we have dealt with before. This is a world where a less developed country can be a great power, and where a problem in a small, unknown country

1 See 'A Global Strategy for the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union', EEAS, <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/>

2 The quotation is taken from an article by Nathalie Tocci introducing the global assessment presented to the European Council in 2015. See "Towards an EU Global Strategy" ed Antonio Missirotti, EUISS. I am not sure whether Churchill ever said this. But he certainly ran out of money often enough.

3 General Schwarzkopf was the Commander of US forces in the Gulf War of 1991.

4 Global Strategy to steer EU external action in an increasingly connected, contested and complex world, EEAS, 30 June 2015, http://www.eeas.europa.eu/top_stories/2015/150627_eu_global_strategy_en.htm

The Dahrendorf Forum is a joint initiative by:

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today may become a crisis for Europe tomorrow, where threats emanate from both weak and strong states. (The crises on Europe's borders all reflect the weakness of states). This is no longer a world run by a few powers that share European culture and history. Even the enemies we fought in the past, fascism and communism, had European origins. In today's world most of those we deal with have histories and habits of thought very different from our own. We need people who understand them and an organisation that values regional expertise and knowledge of foreign languages. The State Department spent five years teaching George Kennan Russian language and culture at a time when the US did not have relations with the Soviet Union. This turned out to be a good investment.⁵

The EU was not designed for diplomacy. Its external policies started with the common commercial policy and the ACP system of preferences for ex-colonies. Later, broader aid programmes were developed; then, enlargement became central to external relations. Domestic considerations primarily drove these policies. Trade is a matter of bargaining with domestic lobbies; enlargement is about others conforming to EU norms. Aid was often seen as a way of doing good, free from the taint of politics. This was a mistake; aid, like force, should be used as part of a political strategy.⁶

The shock of the Balkans showed that idealism was not enough. The EU began to develop instruments to deal with crises, but in a haphazard fashion. When I arrived in Brussels in 2002 there was a powerful trade bureaucracy, a large aid machine, a small military staff, a High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, but nothing resembling

a Foreign Ministry. EU delegations abroad, enjoyed - as the name shows - a subordinate status. The EEAS was created a decade later; it is still half formed and has yet to escape from the Brussels-centred traditions of EU external relations.

That needs to change. The problems of today's world are too complex to be handled by people thousands of miles away. Foreign policy begins with foreign countries and foreign governments. "Neighbourhood policy", which developed out of enlargement, is an example of what has gone wrong: it relies on the assumption that Brussels is the centre of the world. What we have to deal with is not one "neighbourhood", but a number of different countries, each with its own ambitions and problems. The only people who can give good advice on handling them are on the spot. We need an organisation that puts the posts abroad at the centre of policy making.

We also need a system that integrates the capacities of both the Union and the member states. EU institutions preach to the member states on the need for deeper integration but then behave as if they are themselves sovereign, when it comes to their own personnel. For example, Commission staff in missions abroad report to, and have their appraisals written by someone thousands of miles away in their home Directorate General. Member states' ministries are much more flexible. Non-Foreign Ministry staff are frequently integrated fully into national diplomatic missions. Member state diplomats are integrated in EEAS missions.

The Commission does many things brilliantly; its work on energy is a vital contribution to policy towards Russia; the police-training mission in Myanmar,

run under a Commission programme (the Instrument for Stability), is better than many of those under ESDP. The Commission played an indispensable role in the Serbia/Kosovo Dialogue.⁷ If this were the rule, we could do much more. When Federica Mogherini took on her position as High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, the EU Commission President Juncker suggested a new era for the workings of the Commission.⁸ This needs to be built into the organisation.

Diplomacy is about people. Having the right Ambassador matters. Who knows where the next crisis will erupt? The qualities needed are varied and elusive: empathy, curiosity, courage, imagination, persistence, and much more. There are hundreds of ways to be a good diplomat: the only indispensable elements are personality and a political sense. Personnel management when people come from twenty-eight national services and different temperamental institutions is, to say the least, a challenge. We need a personnel policy that is both inclusive and ruthless. The pool of talent in member states, big and small, is enormous; and we should not be afraid of recruiting specialists from outside. A multinational team that works well beats anything from a single country.

The need for a change of culture

Jack Welsh: "We have a strategy. It's called, pick a general direction and then implement like hell."⁹

This applies also to foreign policy. Once the strategy is agreed, it has to be applied across the world in different local situations. To do this we need creative people; and we need to give them room to take the initiative and to take responsibility.

⁵ There is a story that policy in the EEAS is that everyone should be a "generalist" and staff are excluded from working on countries of which they have knowledge or experience. This is too absurd to be true.

⁶ In the 1980s, the EU gave aid to Yugoslavia without a political strategy, and without understanding that the recipients were using it to prepare for the option of breaking the country up.

⁷ These examples are from the author's personal experience.

⁸ Mission Letter by Jean Claude Juncker, President of the Commission to Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union of Foreign Policy and Security Policy/Vice President of the European Commission 1 November 2014 http://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/cwt/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mogherini_en.pdf

⁹ The famous and successful CEO of General Electric.



The culture of the EU has been formed by its role as a regulatory agency: cautious, legal, neutral, technocratic, apolitical, based on consensus and compromise. EU foreign policy is also, necessarily, based on consensus and compromise; but once agreed it needs to be implemented in a local context. In some cases, caution will be right, in others boldness, speed and creativity. A rule-governed bureaucracy is good for many of the things that the EU does, but not for diplomacy. A diverse world needs different approaches in different countries. We should encourage local initiative and experiment.

An ability to make decisions quickly is also useful. Here is a personal anecdote: while I was the High Representative's special envoy for Myanmar we built a good relationship with the Myanmar Election Commission – democracy was a key objective. The Election Commission accepted our offer of assistance in preparing for the 2015 general election and we lent them two European experts under a DG DEVCO programme.¹⁰ It was by no means obvious that an important body in

a country that had been closed for decades would do this. Our experts wanted to take some Commissioners to observe the elections in Pakistan, which had a similar system and was also in transition from a military regime. We knew, however, that Brussels would not be able to process the funding request in time. Instead we asked an NGO, the Open Society Foundation, for help. They took a decision in thirty minutes. This was a good solution; but there is something wrong with the system that creates this kind of problem.

The present system gives Heads of Mission a lot of paper-work and responsibility for funds, but no authority to make decisions.¹¹ Large projects need time and attention; but for small sums, where the objective is political it would make sense for the Head of Mission to enjoy discretion.

There are two ways to bring the EU together. One is by a collective reflection leading to a sense of common purpose. That is the point of the Global Strategy. The second is by the creation of a first class organisation: talented people

working in a culture of initiative and responsibility. Jean Monnet's great insight was that real cooperation needs a shared executive. This also applies to foreign policy.

A final quotation. Gerald Templer:¹²

"First get the strategy right. Then get the right organisation for the strategy. Then get the right men into the organisation. Then get the right spirit into the men."

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¹⁰ EU Commission Directorate General for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO)

¹¹ A year later DEVCO stopped funding the European Experts. I never found out why; the cost was modest. The USA filled the space, and did a good job.

¹² As High Commissioner in Malaya between 1952–54 Field Marshall Sir Gerald Templer defeated the (communist) guerrillas in what is regarded as a classic counter-insurgency campaign, focused on, "hearts and minds" (his phrase) and intelligence. The quotation is approximate, but captures the sense of his doctrine.

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11 MAY 2016