

Why Have a Strategy?

When I began to work on the EUGS, one of the first things I did was to phone up Robert Cooper. Robert, who in 2003 was the Director General for External and Politico-Military Affairs at the General Secretariat of the EU Council of Ministers, was the main drafter of HR Solana's European Security Strategy (ESS). Notwithstanding all the differences between then and now, his advice, probably more than anyone else's, was precious to me. Indeed, the conversation was an eye-opener.

The very first thing he asked me was: "why are you doing this?". The question had not been raised openly in conversation with HRVP Mogherini until then. But of course, the political rationale for undertaking a Strategy had been implicit in our discussions, and the first steps she made in the endeavour. As Robert rightly pointed out, clarity in the political purpose of an exercise such as this was of fundamental importance. Such political purpose would not be stated, black-on-white, in the Strategy itself. But it would inform both the design of the process and ultimately the content of the document itself. And the political rationale for a strategy is intimately connected to the geopolitical context in which it is embedded. Any strategy, while being a long-term vision, is the daughter of its time.

THE POLITICAL RATIONALE FOR THE EUROPEAN SECURITY STRATEGY

The ESS was born in 2003, at a specific historical moment. The European Union was at its height. The euro had started circulating the previous year, marking the most ambitious step of the integration project since the 1957 Treaty of Rome (Tsoukalis 2016: 30–32). At the same time, the Union was on the eve of enlargement to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The success of that process, 1 year later, would mark the long-sought reunification of Europe after half a century of Cold War divide. The euro and the eastern enlargement demonstrated tangibly the depth and breadth of the European project. Enlargement gave a new lease of life to the European narrative of peace and security on the continent, at a time in which the political salience of the traditional peace narrative—Franco-German reconciliation—was losing power as its success over the decades caused it to be taken for granted. The success of the euro in its first years corroborated a second narrative, that of European prosperity through integration. Not only was the single currency the most palpable proof of European integration, but it was also accompanied by years of sustained economic growth during most of the 2000s. The concurrency of the euro and the eastern enlargement also invalidated the thesis that the widening and deepening of the EU were mutually incompatible. Both could be pursued at the same time for the benefit of all. True, already back then some complained about the unwieldy Brussels bureaucracy and the Union’s democratic deficit. But the EU’s legitimacy largely rested on its output (Schmidt 2013). No surprise that the opening line of the ESS read: “Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free” (EUHR 2003: 1). That first sentence captured fully the mood of those times.

Those years were not without difficulties. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 in New York and Washington, D.C. opened the way to the most extreme period of US unilateralism to date. The writing was on the wall by the fall of 2002. The US National Security Strategy released by President George W. Bush in September that year put it bluntly: “America is fighting a war against terrorists of global reach”, arguing that Washington would “act alone, if necessary” as well as “pre-emptively” (The White House 2002). Such pre-emptive and unilateral action was dramatically on display 6 months later, when in March 2003 a US-led coalition of the willing attacked Saddam Hussein’s Iraq without

a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution mandating the “pre-emptive” military intervention. The Iraq War and what came with it—the violation of international law, and the invasion of a country based on false evidence, i.e. the alleged possession of weapons of mass destruction—propelled the USA to the height of its unilateral moment.

Such unilateralism left Europeans with a Shakespearean choice: to be or not to be with the USA? For some EU Member States (and most soon-to-be members from Central and Eastern Europe), sticking with Washington, no matter what, weighed more heavily than anything else. Tony Blair’s UK first and foremost, alongside Silvio Berlusconi’s Italy, José Maria Aznar’s Spain and José Manuel Barroso’s Portugal, stood out among EU-15 in favour of a US-first approach. Jacques Chirac’s France and Gerhard Schröder’s Germany led the widespread opposition to the violation of multilateralism and international law embodied by the US’s onslaught on Iraq. The split within the Union over the Iraq War and the divisions across the Atlantic were deeply felt. Intra-European differences were painfully on show in multilateral fora, beginning with the UNSC. This triggered a deep European soul-searching about how to deal with critical security threats, such as international terrorism, while sticking to multilateralism and international law, which constitute the very moral and ideational bedrock of the European project.

HR Solana’s ESS sought to pick up the pieces and rebuild intra-European and transatlantic consensus. The goal of “effective multilateralism” heralded in the ESS sought to bridge over those differences in typical European fashion. The catchphrase squared the circle of European divisions, reflecting the Franco-German insistence on multilateralism and international law, alongside the British—and American—caveat that such multilateralism had to be effective to be of any value. In sum, the 2003 ESS was the product of its times. It was imbued with the optimism of those years, while seeking a common narrative to heal the transatlantic and intra-European rift over the war in Iraq. In 2003, the geopolitical context had given rise to a clear, simple and crucially important political rationale to embark upon a ESS—rekindling European unity through a quintessentially European narrative. HR Solana saw clearly this rationale and promptly acted upon it.

The same cannot be said of the 2008 Implementation Report on the ESS. In 2008, the context was very different and did not generate a clear and compelling reason to engage in a new strategy. By late 2007, what by then had become 27 EU Member States invited HR

Solana to assess the state of play of the ESS. The aim was that of reviewing the implementation of the Strategy, notably in view of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) missions and operations deployed over those 4 years. The intention of the two main proponents of this initiative—then Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt and newly elected French President Nicolas Sarkozy—went much further however. Rather than simply reviewing the state of play of the ESS, France, in particular, which was gearing up to its presidency of the Council in the second half of 2008 had ambitious plans to launch a brand new ESS. But the mood in Paris was not shared elsewhere. Specifically, there was little enthusiasm for the endeavour in London and Berlin. Javier Solana himself was not keen to embark on a new ESS. Therefore, the result was a rather bland mandate by the European Council to simply review the implementation of the ESS. The context was not propitious for a new Strategy.

The change in the context during the drafting of the Implementation Report muddled the waters further, hollowing out even more the political rationale for a new Strategy. It would be incorrect to say that 2008 was devoid of foreign policy dramas: Kosovo's declaration of independence, NATO's Bucharest summit and the Russo-Georgian War that followed it made it an eventful year. But rather than raising the interest in and galvanising consensus around the need for a new strategy, these events simply served to exacerbate divisions between the 27 EU Member States. Indeed, the 2008 Implementation Report was not formally endorsed by the Council, not least because Cyprus—as a non-NATO Member with traditionally close ties to Russia—objected to the wording on NATO in the text.

But the most important reason why the wind was taken out of the sails of a new ESS in 2008 was because of the global financial earthquake triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in New York in September that year. Indeed, the outbreak of the global financial crisis and the ensuing spillover into the Eurozone by 2009–2010 distracted all high-level political attention away from foreign and security policy. The EU was entering a protracted and profound period of introspection, aimed at saving the single currency. With the Eurozone, and the European Union itself, on the line, the political space and rationale for engaging in a new Security Strategy was close to nil, both in 2008 and in the dramatic years that followed. Far from strategising, the European Council frantically jumped from one emergency meeting to the next to save the ailing euro, and with it, the European Union as a whole.

A compelling geostrategic context and a clear political awareness of it are the necessary conditions for a productive strategic reflection process. This was probably the most important lesson I drew from the ESS, compared to its 2008 sequel. In the case of 2003, the political logic was crystal clear: HR Solana embarked upon the ESS for a single and simple political reason: bridging the scarring divide created by the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq both within the EU and across the Atlantic. The process and the content of the ESS reflected that political purpose. Indeed, the ESS contributed in no small measure to fulfilling its primary political task and mending the divide that had paralysed the Union that year. In 2008, the context was far murkier, and in the months and years that followed, the limited space for foreign policy thinking was eaten up by internal economic governance issues generated by the Eurozone crisis. As opposed to 2003, in 2008 the European Union was not ready for a new strategy.

THE POLITICAL RATIONALE FOR THE EU GLOBAL STRATEGY

Fast-forward to 2015, why did HRVP Federica Mogherini embark upon a process of strategic reflection and then produced an EU Global Strategy? By late 2014, the context was radically different once again. While the EU's internal ills were far from over, they were matched and in many ways surpassed by a dramatically deteriorating geostrategic environment. At the very least, such context meant that the opening line of the 2003 ESS—"Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure, nor so free" (EUHR 2003: 1)—was no longer true. Just like in 2003, and unlike 2008, it was the geostrategic context which generated the political need for a new strategy and crystallised the consensus for it among what by then were 28 Member States. Just like in 2003 when HR Solana understood that context and responded to it, so did HRVP Mogherini in 2015–2016. As we began working on the EU strategic reflection in 2015, retracing the thought process and political logic of 2003 was crucial in designing the process, the content and the follow-up of the EUGS. Unlike in 2003 when there was one fundamental reason to produce the ESS, in 2015–2016, there were three main reasons to produce the EUGS: to promote policy direction, to strengthen political unity and to boost the effectiveness of external actions.

POLICY DIRECTION: PROVIDING A CHART TO NAVIGATE TROUBLED WATERS

The history of the European integration project has never been smooth, with lots of major challenges having been faced over the decades. At times, these were related to the process of European integration itself. This was true in the mid-1960s, with the “empty chair crisis” in which French President Charles de Gaulle boycotted European institutions in view of France’s opposition to the supranationalist turn of the European Commission. Likewise, in the 1970s German economist Herbert Giersch coined the term “Eurosclerosis” to describe the protracted economic stagnation affecting western Europe.

At other times, difficulties were driven by external developments and the EU’s reaction, or rather inaction, to them. The most well-known example was in 1991, when the escalating civil war in the Balkans led the then Luxembourg Prime Minister Jacques Poos to pompously announce the “hour of Europe”, only to be followed by the Community’s total inability to stop the carnage, lacking as it did the institutional machinery both to develop a common analysis of the problem and to pursue a common response to it. Europeans collectively failed to act, embarrassingly leaving the job to the Anglo-French artillery under UN command and to NATO, followed by the US-brokered 1993 Dayton accords that put an end to the war in Bosnia. It came as no surprise that Europe’s shame in the Balkans galvanised the 12 members of the Community at the time to establish through the 1993 Maastricht Treaty the three-pillar structure of the Union, which lasted until the 2009 Lisbon Treaty. With Maastricht, what had been a loose process of European Political Cooperation on foreign policy between Community members was upgraded into the Common Foreign and Security Policy, the second pillar of the Union. CSFP thus came to stand alongside the first Community pillar, largely centred on the single market, and the third pillar focusing on justice and home affairs.

In short, European integration has been marked and at times spurred by challenges and crises both within and beyond Europe. But never more than today has there been such a concurrence of multiple threats and challenges, within and without, whose sheer number and depth are questioning the very existence of the European project.

In late 2014, when my first conversations with Federica Mogherini on what was to become the EU Global Strategy took place, the European

Union had already been going through critical years. In 2005, France and the Netherlands voted down the EU Constitutional Treaty: the product of the Convention on the Future of Europe. The internal crisis this generated was not resolved until 2009, when the Lisbon Treaty—a marginally reworded version of the Constitutional Treaty, sanitised of the latter’s most symbolic elements—entered into force. The constitutional crisis, alongside the “big bang” enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe in 2004, took its toll on the appetite for further enlargements. Romania and Bulgaria completed the eastern enlargement in 2007, and Croatia managed to enter the Union in 2013. But most other countries, both within the enlargement process and in the remit of the ENP, began suffering from the EU’s “enlargement fatigue” as it became known in those years (Devrim and Schulz 2009).

Worse still, no sooner was the EU’s constitutional crisis over, than the Eurozone crisis kicked in. Triggered by the 2008 global financial crisis, with Greece’s revelations of its gaping public finance holes, by 2009 markets began speculating on the viability of the Eurozone (Tsoukalis 2016). Beyond the specific vulnerabilities of the EU Member States at the geographical periphery of the Union, notably Portugal, Ireland, Greece and Spain, as well as Italy and shortly afterwards followed by Cyprus, the crisis raised a deeper question about the viability of a European monetary union. The Eurozone crisis exposed the fatal flaws of a monetary union between widely different economies joined by a single currency without, however, a unified fiscal policy to compensate for these variations. The very existence of the EU’s most visible achievement, half-baked as it was—the Euro—was at stake. If the Euro fell, it risked bringing down with it the entire European edifice.

If this were not enough, the EU’s neighbourhood, both to the east and to the south, plunged into unprecedented chaos and violence. To the east, as the EU approached the completion of its association process with the Eastern Partnership countries, notably Ukraine, the illusion of partnership between the EU and Russia dissolved (see Annex A: 107 and 115). That Russia had never accepted the notion of NATO’s expansion to the east was well known. Indeed, the 2008 Bucharest Summit, in which NATO declared that Georgia and Ukraine “will become” allies one day, triggered visible displeasure in Moscow. NATO was and will remain viewed with deep suspicion and animosity by Russians. But by then, EU enlargement began generating similar misgivings in Moscow. Associated as it was with democratisation, the EU started being viewed

with suspicion in Moscow, which saw in its policies a cause of “colour revolutions” which could have eventually spilled into Russia proper, provoking regime change there too. The sequence of events is well known. As Kiev was on the verge of signing its Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement with the EU in the fall of 2013, Russian President Vladimir Putin put forward to his Ukrainian counterpart “an offer he couldn’t refuse”. The promise of \$15bn in aid and a one-third reduction in Russian gas prices brought Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich joyfully to his knees. Ukraine’s backtracking from the EU triggered escalating popular protests in Kiev’s Maidan square, which ultimately led to the collapse of Yanukovich’s government in February 2014. This was followed by Russia’s annexation of Crimea in March and its intervention in eastern Ukraine since then.

The south of the Union fared no better (see Annex A: 107 and 116–117). By late 2011, hopes for an Arab spring had started evaporating, opening the way to diametrically different seasonal or historical analogies being used instead. By the summer of 2011, Syria spiralled into an all-out civil war, which saw an accelerating outflow of internally displaced persons within Syria, and of Syrian refugees in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan. Two years later, Egypt succumbed to a full-blown military coup which ousted the elected—albeit admittedly incompetent—President Mohammed Morsi and established an even harsher authoritarian regime than the one which existed before the 2011 uprising. After its parliamentary elections in early 2014, Libya, which had been largely abandoned by Europeans and Americans after NATO’s intervention and the ouster of Muammar Ghaddafi in 2011, gradually descended into civil war. In 2014, Israel waged war, again, on Gaza; Saudi Arabia attacked Yemen’s Houthis, and more broadly the regional rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran escalated, with Syrians, Yemenis and plummeting oil revenues being the most obvious casualties. Also in 2014, the ruptures within al-Qaeda in the Levant coupled with the spread of sectarianism and ungoverned spaces in Iraq and Syria led to the establishment of ISIS, later self-renamed Islamic State. While Tunisia was left standing as the only shimmer of light in a darkening region, far from an Arab spring, all the talk began revolving around an Arab winter or a Middle Eastern version of Europe’s 30 years’ war.

As the Middle East imploded, the European Union, a few kilometres away from its shores, was not immune. Beginning with the Charlie Hebdo massacre in January 2015, to be followed by a gruesome sequence of terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice and elsewhere, the

implosion of the Middle East began reverberating into Europe too. This was not so much the case of Islamic State terrorists travelling from Mosul or Raqqa to carry out their bloody attacks in Europe. The problem was rather that of a growing pool of European citizens, who from being “only” depressed, marginalised or petty criminals, rapidly transformed into dangerous terrorists, intoxicated by the idea of a violent jihad, which knows no borders between the Middle East, Europe and beyond. At least since 2010, the most acute crises facing the Union have been within and at the borders of the EU itself. But the list of threats and challenges the EU is called upon to respond does not stop here.

In Asia, security tensions have been mounting (see Annex A: 108 and 119). Coming on top of a nuclear capable and unpredictable North Korea, Asian insecurity has been rising due to the changing balance of power caused by China’s rise. China’s economic growth is, perhaps inevitably, coming alongside greater Chinese political and military assertiveness in its own neighbourhood. This is generating a nascent competition between the USA and China in the Pacific, growing apprehension of Asian powers such as Japan, South Korea and Australia, as well as of smaller South East Asian countries such as the Philippines. The military build-up in the East and South China Seas is the most tangible manifestation of this fact. In many respects, Europe is far removed from Asia’s security woes. Particularly when it comes to the US–China competition, some may think that Europe does not have a dog in the fight. Yet the EU does have a huge stake in Asian security. Europe is Asia’s first economic partner, and vice versa. European prosperity thus hinges on Asian security, and therefore the Union cannot remain idle watching insecurity mount in the region.

Likewise, development and security in Africa are of paramount importance to the Union (see Annex A: 117). Africa lies at Europe’s doorstep, being separated by a tiny strip of sea, which is the Mediterranean. While Africa is and should be viewed as a land of opportunity for Africans and for the wider world, there remain plenty of problems in the continent, which the Union must grapple with. In many regions, African economic development lags behind the continent’s demographic growth. The persistence of old conflicts, the emergence of new security problems connected with the spread of terrorist movements such as Boko Haram and the challenges of climate change and food insecurity all represent vital challenges and threats to Africa and to Europe alike.

Finally, the Union and its Member States must deal with wider global threats and challenges. Global financial turmoil, the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic, mounting cases of cybercrime, unspeakable humanitarian crises, natural disasters, climate change, plummeting global energy markets, persisting organised crime and the pending problems of unreformed global governance institutions, beginning with the United Nations and the International Financial Institutions, are but a few examples of our more connected, contested and complex world (see Annex A: 104–115).

The EU and its Member State cannot but react to this long list of threats and challenges. But whereas agreeing on how to react is the bread and butter of most discussions of the Foreign Affairs Council, alone it is woefully insufficient. Paradoxically, the more time is spent reacting due to the sheer number and depth of crises at hand, the more urgently its leaders feel the need for a clear direction and a proactive policy.

As mentioned in the Introduction, this need was strongly felt by the HRVP herself. From her days as the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, she lamented the constant and erratic mode of foreign policy reaction. She felt that European leaders and policy-makers were simply jumping from one crisis to the next, hopelessly seeking to put out one fire, only to discover the next had already broken out. In this hectic dance, the time and space to look beyond the present and address root causes and tomorrow's challenges were simply absent. It felt like being a captain of a ship in stormy waters without a chart indicating the way.

Hence, the first policy aim of the strategic reflection was that of creating the time and space to look ahead. The Strategy aimed to be the chart that the HRVP felt European foreign policy lacked and needed. Neither she nor any leader was under the illusion that a EUGS would provide a literal blueprint for action on the way ahead. A strategy is not an action plan on what to do today or tomorrow. Reaction will continue to occupy centre stage in European foreign policy and indeed international relations. But a strategy indicates the EU's broad goals and addresses the necessary means to achieve these. Equipping the EU for the future does not necessarily require the ability to predict precisely the crises of tomorrow. In fact, investing in making the EU's policies and instruments more credible, more joined-up and more responsive—as the EUGS concludes—is necessary precisely because of the unpredictability lying ahead (see Annex B: 155–161).

POLITICAL UNITY: BRIDGING OVER MULTIPLE DIVIDES

Like in 2003, today the EU is divided. This time there is not one single cleavage—as over the 2003 war in Iraq—but rather multiple ones. In view of these multiple divisions within and between the Member States, which taken together have triggered the deepest existential crisis of the European project since its inception, the EUGS sought to re-instil political unity among Europeans. If, through the strategic reflection and the EUGS, Europeans could understand one another better and agree on a shared narrative concerning the EU's role in the world, this would serve to rekindle a degree of political unity in the Union as a whole. As social constructivists would say, discourse, including strategy-making, is an identity-building exercise.

The multiple crises discussed above generated different cleavages between the Member States. The Eurozone crisis and the economic crisis that followed sowed unprecedented divisions and mistrust particularly between the northern and southern Member States. The exposure of the wide economic divergences between Eurozone members, and the fiscal laxity displayed, and in the case of Greece concealed, by some Member States, generated huge distrust in the north, notably in Germany, towards southern members. The result was the imposition of top-down harsh austerity measures through a series of packs, and pacts shoved down the throats of southern economies on the brink. In particular, the activation of the Troika—the Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Spain and Ireland, and the intergovernmental Fiscal Compact aimed at enshrining fiscal rigour in the constitutions of Eurozone members were despised measures by many members at the geographical periphery of the Union. These steps contributed in no small measure in triggering the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s in these countries, generating an unprecedented wave of antipathy towards the north, and Germany in particular. The result was a dialogue of the deaf. Germany spoke the *ordo-liberal* language of austerity and adamantly resisted moves towards a “transfer union” in which richer and more responsible “creditors” had to bail out the irresponsible fiscal laxity of the “debtors” (Schmidt 2016). Southern European countries finger pointed Germany's gains reaped from the competitive advantage of being part of a monetary union with weaker economies and advocated growth for all through an end of austerity. They supported the completion of the Eurozone project through a banking

union, a fiscal union and a political union, as advocated by the four presidents of the Union in 2012 (Van Rompuy et al. 2012).

Beyond putting out the immediate fire that risked bringing down the Eurozone by enshrining fiscal consolidation and making the first steps towards a banking union, the divide between the Member States persists. There has been no sign of abating of the north–south divide over austerity versus growth. The deep cleavage over the conduct of economic policy within the Union has been reflected in a standstill over the Euro area’s governance. The banking union is only partially complete, while precious little has been done to move towards a fiscal or a political union as had been championed by the four former presidents of EU institutions in 2012, and later revised into the five presidents report in 2015 (Van Rompuy et al. 2012; Juncker et al. 2015). In other words, having done the bare minimum to avoid falling into the abyss, the deep cleavage between the Member States over how to handle the economy has left the Union dangerously tinkering at its edges.

The quagmire to the east sowed further divisions. The crisis over Ukraine exposed old divisions within the EU, notably between the southern/western and northern/eastern Member States. Russia has always been viewed with suspicion in most central, eastern and northern European countries. Historical memories are understandably entrenched. They violently resurfaced with the events in Ukraine and more broadly by an assertive Russia that seemed to have suddenly re-awoken from its post-Cold War torpor. These fears were lost on the other Member States in the south and west of the Union. For these countries, Russia was a serious commercial partner and an indispensable energy provider. This meant that Russia was certainly not viewed as a threat, if anything as a partner. Still in the fall of 2014, after the annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of violence in Donbass, many Europeans, notably from southern and western Europe, insisted on referring to Russia as a “strategic partner”, sending shockwaves in the Baltics, Poland, Sweden and others. Furthermore, southern European relations with eastern Europe had never been particularly strong. This meant that, while never openly stated, the sovereignty of countries such as Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia was hardly viewed as a strategic priority by the southern Member States. Deep down, many in these countries believe that Russia has a rightful claim to its “zone of influence” in eastern Europe. In other words, a heightened threat perception in the east, coupled with a lack of empathy in the south towards the east’s predicament, generated another

scarring divide in the EU between those Member States feeling the heat of Russia's assertiveness in the east and those wishing to reset the clock back to pre-2014 normality, i.e. before Russia's annexation of Crimea. Had the EUGS been written in 2014, I am sure this would have been by far the most divisive issue.

The imploding North Africa and the Middle East, and the "refugee crisis" this generated, brought about a third cleavage, this time between the east and the west. Since its first entry into force in 1997, the Dublin regulation, subsequently revised in 2003 and 2013, foresees that refugees seeking international protection in the EU can only apply for asylum in the first country of arrival in the Union. Up until the early 2010s, the system had its logic. On the one hand, the northern Member States such as Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands hosted far greater number of migrants than the southern Member States. Therefore, it was only fair to begin redressing the imbalance by calling upon the southern Member States to absorb new arrivals. Furthermore, throughout the 1990s and 2000s, migrants did not only or even predominantly come from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, but also from the Balkans, Afghanistan and Asia. In other words, not all made their way into the EU across the Mediterranean to Europe's southern shores, but arrived through multiple entry points into the Union. On the other hand, southern European economies such as Greece and Spain had witnessed high growth rates in the 1990s and 2000s, thus being able to absorb the relatively contained numbers of migrants that arrived to their shores in those years.

The Eurozone crisis coupled with the imploding Middle East broke the logic that had underpinned the Dublin system (Henry and Pastore 2014). Southern European economies, badly hit by the economic crisis, were in no position to absorb large numbers of migrants. At the same time, violence, repression and ungoverned spaces in North Africa and the Middle East led to an outpour of refugees seeking protection in Europe. Unable to reach Europe through legal channels, the only means available to them were irregular ones, crossing dangerous land and sea borders to reach the southern members of the Union, in particular, Italy and Greece. The latter began vociferously calling for European solidarity as the migrants seeking to cross into the EU rose. Greater solidarity is essential to the southern Member States on the receiving end of hundreds of thousands of migrants who seek protection in Europe, having risked their lives—often not surviving—crossing the Sahara Desert and

the Mediterranean Sea. Translated into policy practice, this meant a call to set aside the Dublin regulation, which foreseeing that refugees must apply for asylum in the first EU country of arrival, practically meant that their applications had to be processed and eventually accepted solely in Greece and Italy.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, out of need perhaps more than heart, eventually heard the call, working hand-in-glove with the European Commission to gradually move away from the Dublin system towards a system of quotas, in which the refugees entering the EU through the southern shores would be relocated to the other Member States according to their relative size and absorption capacity. The push was on the establishment of a refugee relocation mechanism within the Union, proposed first through the Commission's Agenda on Migration in 2015 and then advanced by successive European Council decisions in 2015 and 2016.

But this push sent shock waves across central and eastern Europe, and was viewed as a slap in the face by nationalist governments particularly in Hungary and Poland, and to a lesser extent Slovakia and the Czech Republic. The near absence of migration in these countries, the construction imaginary enemies to defeat, memories of top-down Soviet decisions and the presence of self-declared illiberal governments in power claiming that their erection of fences was the ultimate defence of Christian Europe from the barbarian "others" was an explosive mix. They strongly opposed all Commission plans on resettlement and relocation, more still the longer term intention to move towards a genuinely common asylum system. With Hungary upping the ante by calling a referendum on the relocation mechanism (which failed to achieve a quorum in October 2016), and Merkel losing steam after the German political backlash against her summer 2015 open door policy to refugees, the standstill over internal migration and asylum policy within the EU deepened. Italy and Greece, left alone to face the migration challenge, became increasingly resentful of the EU's lack of solidarity, feeding further Euroscepticism in the south.

In other words, to the north-south divide over the economy and the east-south/west divide over Russia, an east-west divide on the underlying values of the European project was exposed in full force by the "refugee crisis". The EU's "refugee crisis" is not a crisis of numbers. A couple of million arrivals in a Union of 500 million people may be a challenge of absorption, integration and naturalisation, but in no way

does it constitute a “crisis”. Saying so is deeply insulting particularly to those countries in the region that shoulder incommensurately higher burdens in incommensurately worse circumstances. If Lebanon, a fragile country of 4 million hosting over 1.5 million Syrian refugees is not in “crisis”, how can a prosperous Union of 500 million define itself so due to the arrival of a few million desperate souls reaching its shores? The EU’s “refugee crisis” has been a different sort of crisis. I strongly believe it is first and foremost a crisis of values, of which Europeans should feel ashamed. It is also an intra-EU crisis that has seen deep divergences emerge between the Member States, as well as the European Commission, which have prevented meaningful EU steps forward on establishing genuinely common asylum and migration policies. In other words, all the Member States agree on the need to control migration flows into the EU through border management and external migration policy. However, there has been a sharp divide between those that want to move forward on a genuine common asylum and migration system, and those who simply focus on the control of external borders aimed at stemming the inflow into the Union altogether.

Intra-EU divisions have not only emerged between the Member States, but also within them, as openly acknowledged in the 2015 strategic assessment (see Annex A: 110). Populism and Euroscepticism are not new in Europe. However, they have acquired a higher profile with the turn of the century through a potent mix of anti-immigration sentiment, post-9/11 Islamophobia, EU enlargement fatigue and the Eurozone crisis, all cast against the broader backlash against globalisation to which also non-Europeans, notably North Americans, are not immune, as evidenced by Donald Trump’s 2016 presidential victory in the USA. For the first time, populist and anti-systemic Euroscepticism—or more accurately Europhobia—is becoming a mass phenomenon in several EU Member States. These anti-systemic movements do not simply position themselves “against the elites” and “with the people”, but do so by challenging the very foundations of the political system, including the basic principles of representative democracy.

The tones and shades of these movements and parties differ. In southern European countries, notably Greece, Italy and Spain, they have tended to be left-leaning. Such movements are not always or necessarily anti-European. However, they have tended to blame the EU and its policy of austerity for crumbling welfare systems, soaring unemployment, precarious working conditions and anaemic or negative growth.

This has led to them to question the very legitimacy of the EU project, thus acquiring a distinct Eurosceptic spin. The rise of these parties and movements has reflected the escalation of public distrust of the EU in weak southern Eurozone economies, in which the transfer of sovereignty out of the hands of national politicians has been starkest. Data from a 2016 Pew survey are striking. Traditionally, Europhile countries such as Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal now display the highest levels of Euroscepticism in the EU (Pew Research Center 2016). In response, and as a means of acquiring standing among their publics, emerging political entrepreneurs as well as mainstream centre-right and centre-left wing parties in the south increasingly rely on the politics of symbolism and populism. Opportunistically, the European Union has become their favourite punching ball to galvanise consent among the public.

Further north, in France, Germany, Austria or the Netherlands, far-right racist parties, from being marginal and marginalised, have risen at an astounding pace, mounting a formidable challenge to the mainstream. In this case, Euroscepticism is driven by the nationalist/sovereigntist DNA of these parties, alongside their view of the EU as a liberal force spurring the free movement of people—aka migration—as well as free trade. Governing centre-right or centre-left parties in these countries, fearful of being outflanked from the right, have tended to adopt partially populist right-wing agendas, notably with respect to migration, asylum, Islam and a resistance to free trade. In other words, even if not in government, the rise of the populist and Eurosceptic right in many northern European countries has already polluted the political and policy agenda of the mainstream.

In some central and eastern European countries, notably Hungary and Poland, nationalist, populist and Eurosceptic parties actually won elections and are in office, challenging the democratic foundations of these states and the underlying values of the EU as a whole. The EU's powerlessness vis-à-vis these developments debilitates the Union's standing and is gleefully watched by other populist authoritarian leaders outside the EU, first and foremost Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Finally, and most dramatically: Brexit. The UK's referendum campaign on EU membership and the ultimate victory of the Leave campaign signalled at once a fundamental crisis in one of the oldest European representative democracies, a dramatic political, generational and geographical split within an EU Member State, the legitimisation of

the basest of nativist instincts, the opportunistic, leveraging of the politics of fear, and the weakening of the European project as a whole.

Amidst all these divisions between and within the Member States, the strategic reflection and the EUGS hoped to provide an opportunity to regenerate a degree of unity—without which there is no policy. The deep divisions between north and south, east and west, and within every EU Member State would not disappear with the EUGS of course. Nor would the strategic reflection have determined the fate of the UK referendum, although then Prime Minister David Cameron arguably could have made more of the strategic case for the UK to remain in the EU.¹ But with all its limits, the EUGS aimed to make a political contribution to the European project in times of unprecedented division. As explained in Chap. 3, this was ultimately the reason why the HRVP decided to proceed with the publication of the EUGS 48 hours after the fateful UK referendum. The Strategy both highlighted the need for unity among Europeans, but also, in and of itself, implicitly told a story of how unity is still possible. Ultimately without political unity, it would have been impossible to produce a document that brought together 28 Member States, all EU institutions and key segments of the European foreign policy community writ large.

THE BUREAUCRATIC RATIONALE: A JOINED-UP UNION

The Strategy sought to foster a more joined-up Union in external action. In 2003, the world was a fairly benign place. Europe certainly was. Hence, the 2003 ESS did not have to preoccupy itself too much with action. The action the EU was pursuing was, broadly speaking, heading in the right direction, or so it seemed at the time. While policy-makers in the early 2000s were already conscious of the failure over Iraq, the shadow of failure in the Balkans meant that quite a lot of action was already underway. Therefore, it was sufficient for the ESS to provide a shared vision that helped foster a newfound sense of political unity notably between the three largest EU Member States: France, Germany and the UK, and across the Atlantic.

In 2015–2016, the multiple crises in Europe and beyond and the multiple divisions between and within the Member States which had been caused, exacerbated or exposed by these crises meant that changing the course of action was essential. Business as usual in EU foreign policy-making could not be an option. But to change action and to deliver

better results in EU foreign policy, a wide set of institutional actors had to be brought to work together far more systematically. This is the most important and interesting interpretation of what the EU “Global” Strategy meant. A Global Strategy would have to be a “whole of EU” endeavour, engaging the multiple players in their respective institutions and policy areas, within EU institutions and the Member States, which can deliver better policy results only by working more together.

This was the spirit of the Lisbon Treaty, which created the European External Action Service to act as an interface between the Member States and the European Commission and, as a blend between the two, become the nascent diplomatic service of the Union. The aim of a more joined-up Union was also behind the Lisbon Treaty’s creation of a triple-hatted HR/VP, who would at once be the Vice President of the Commission, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council, as well as the head of the European Defence Agency.

In between the drafting of what eventually became the Lisbon Treaty and its execution, there was a gap of 6 years: many seemed to have forgotten the spirit of the Convention on the Future of Europe and why many of those decisions were actually taken. The rationale behind the Lisbon Treaty needed to be reminded and the strategic reflection sought to do just that. A third aim of the exercise was, therefore, that of strengthening the Lisbon Treaty’s provisions that called upon all external policy players to be brought closer together with a view to delivering more effective policy. Simply put, the Global Strategy was an attempt to implement the letter and spirit of the Lisbon Treaty in the area of foreign and security policy, hence, the emphasis on a joined-up Union both in the strategic assessment as well as in the Strategy proper (see Annex A: 127–129; Annex B: 159–161). This was a task which, according to many, the first HRVP Catherine Ashton had failed to achieve. In 2009, it was a daunting challenge. Setting up the EEAS against the Commission’s brick wall, while concurrently wearing all hats designed by the Lisbon Treaty and confronting the post 2011 Arab uprisings, was no simple feat. Ashton thus focused her attention on the establishment of the EEAS as well as on her role as HR, essentially dropping almost entirely her hat as the Vice President of the European Commission, with some notable exceptions.² It is not the aim here to pass judgement on the choices made and steps taken by HRVP Ashton. To be fair, the Commission made her life very difficult, by jealously guarding its external action

competences and resisting these to be blended with the CFSP as part of a coherent EU foreign policy. Confronted with an unproductive institutional tug of war, Ashton yielded, understandably wanting to get on with the job and do something. It is beside the point whether HRVP Ashton could have done more or better to wear fully the many hats granted to her by the Lisbon Treaty. Responsibilities for this sorry state of affairs aside, her mandate was associated with scarring divides and institutional turf wars in the Brussels beltway between the Commission and the Council, with the fledgling EEAS lacking substantive powers to effectively bring them together (Balfour 2014).

Following the 2014 European Parliament elections and the nomination of the new Commission, many were eager to turn the page. This is not to say that institutional turf wars are over, far from it. Political, institutional and personal battles are still fought, often through the use and abuse of bureaucratic procedures. But by the autumn of 2014, there was a general sense in the Brussels bubble that the moment had come for a partial timeout. The truth was that no one could succeed in achieving policy and often political aims by operating myopically in his or her silo either by elbowing others out or by simply ignoring their existence. The result of siloed approaches was sub-optimal policy outcomes for all. Particularly within the Commission, many were aware of the need for a more strategic approach to the use of the potentially extremely powerful instruments at their disposal. In its absence, the result was a mix of bureaucratic inertia coupled with the uncoordinated pursuit of the political agendas of individual Commissioners. In the sorry state, the Union is in business as usual was a luxury they could not afford.

The strategic reflection leading to the EUGS sought to translate this theoretical realisation among different institutional players into concrete action, by bringing them together in practice. In other words, the third political objective of the EUGS was to act as a bureaucratic silo-breaking exercise, and through the breaking or at least the bending of silos, contribute to better policy outcomes which the Union badly needed. The strategic reflection and the EUGS sought to live up to up the letter and spirit of the Lisbon Treaty, which was far from being fully implemented as far as the Union's external action is concerned.

The three political aims underpinning the EUGS—policy direction, political unity and a joined-up Union—were strictly connected, for good and ill. On the one hand, a vicious circle could clearly be traced: the multiple crises had led the Union to lose its bearings, as well as causing

or exacerbating multiple divisions between and within the Member States and the EU institutions. These divisions fed and fuelled siloed policy responses, which were woefully inadequate to tackle the multiple crises that spread and deepened by the day. On the other hand, the strategic reflection and the EUGS sought to make one small step to reverse the trend into a more virtuous dynamic. A shared narrative could at once provide a sense of direction to navigate the multiple crises surrounding the EU and contribute to healing the manifold divisions within it. Such healing would in turn contribute to the breaking of policy and institutional silos and thus seek to deliver more effective policy necessary to address the manifold crises.

With this political rationale in mind, the process, the content and the follow-up of the EUGS had to be shaped accordingly, much like the political rationale for the ESS had framed the 2003 and 2008 endeavours.

NOTES

1. Cameron opened the campaign by saying that the EU was vital for the UK's security, making many think that he was going to make a broad case for Remain; strangely he then switched to making exclusively the economic case for staying in, and stayed there throughout the campaign.
2. Among such exceptions, it is worth recalling the attention devoted by HRVP Ashton to revising the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011. Today, the 2011 revision of the ENP is considered a failure, triggering a further revision in 2015. But at the time, when hopes for an Arab spring ran high, the 2011 revision was cautiously welcomed by many (Cassarino and Tocci 2011).

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