

# FOREIGN POLICY AND EXTERNAL ACTIONS: AN “UNSURPASSABLE HORIZON” FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION?

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We propose the English version of an article by Yves Bertoncini published by “La Revue Socialiste”<sup>1</sup> and analysing the progresses and limits of the European Union external action twenty after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty. This Tribune recalls that the proclamation of a “Common foreign and security policy” has fueled the recurring consideration that it doesn’t actually exist, but also to persuade people of the need for it to exist in a world where the EU is getting older and smaller. It combines analyses and recommendations on three complementary stands : (1) The components of an EU external policy can be identified; (2) Going beyond the “Europe space” is the responsibility of the promoters of an “Europe power”; (3) The evolution of the international situation could lead to more common external actions.

The European Union’s (EU) “Common foreign and security policy” (CFSP) was christened exactly twenty years ago, when the Maastricht Treaty came into force. The main impact of this daring declaration has been to fuel the recurring consideration that the “CFSP” does not actually exist, given that we have witnessed countless instances of European diplomatic inertia or disunion since then, ranging from the second war in Iraq to the recent military operation in Mali.

One is often prompted to regret that Jacques Delors was not heeded when he recommended to adopt the more realistic goal of “common foreign policy actions”, of which we could certainly compile a more constructive list today even as we might appeal for their scope to be broadened. Yet there is one good thing about the spectre of this CFSP haunting Europe: it has persuaded people of the need for it to exist to a greater degree in a world where the EU is getting older and constantly shrinking by comparison with the other leading powers.

It is in this ambivalent context that we need to further the debate on the EU’s foreign policy, underscoring the fact that, while certain elements of that policy may already exist, a number of political factors still stand in the way of its being expressed, though developments on the international scene could well facilitate it in the medium term.

## 1. A piecemeal European “foreign policy”

While the CFSP as a whole finds it hard to exist, we can nevertheless identify the component parts of an EU foreign policy built on the basis of the European Economic Community’s essential spheres of authority.

The customs union signed in Rome has made trade policy an exclusive province of the EU, which acts through the leverage of tariff barriers (which are always high in the farming industry), of non-tariff barriers (norms, standards and so on) and by resorting to trade defence tools (especially in the anti-dumping field). The EU being the world’s leading commercial power, it wields considerable *de facto* influence in its relations with its partners in this sphere, even if it finds it difficult to translate that influence into political clout.

The same observation has often been made regarding humanitarian and development aid policies. The EU’s humanitarian aid accounts for roughly one-third of the member states’ overall spending, as compared to almost one-fourth for Community development aid (including the “European Development Fund (EDF)”: this partial pooling of expenditure means that in each instance the EU is the world’s primary donor. This allows the EU to enjoy a strong presence in areas of conflict and in those regions of the world that are finding it hard to emerge, yet without always reaping all of the political dividends from that action, as amply

demonstrated in its handling of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The diplomatic impact of the EU's enlargement policy, on the other hand, can be clearly identified: it is because twenty-two countries have wished to join the European construction since it was launched that they have agreed to make an often considerable effort to adapt and to adjust, a goal which today's candidates have yet to achieve. It is "Europe" first and foremost, its rules, its values and its interests, which have to worm their way into those candidate countries before they, in their turn, can join the EU once they have met all of the conditions set them and if all of the member states agree to their membership. This lever effect explains why enlargement policy is often presented as one of the most important components of the EU's foreign policy - a policy that is far more difficult to detect in other areas.

This is the case with the "energy-climate" package that prompted the EU and its member states to set themselves ambitious common goals in the field of greenhouse gas reductions ahead of 2020, but also to randomly initiate "energy transition" processes without succeeding in rallying the other major powers on the planet to the cause<sup>2</sup>. It is the case also in the field of financial supervision with recent efforts to reform standards and practices, which have been extended with only limited success at the international level (G8-G20). As for the EU's exchange rate policy, it has been left hanging in the air on account of a lack of consensus among member states on the principle of a voluntary strategy - it goes without saying that they would also hold different opinions as to the desirable exchange rate to be established.

People's expectations of an EU "foreign policy" naturally tend to focus on the diplomatic and military terrain, yet it is on that terrain that member states are, deplorably, more often at odds with one another than they are united. This lack of unity is largely due to the fact that while the EU produces standards and norms of international scope and importance, it does not "produce security" for its member states<sup>3</sup>, and it is thus by its very nature more evanescent on the strategic level.

Yet the tools adopted in Maastricht and in Amsterdam have been put to good use since then: the EU has adopted over 400 «common positions» towards certain regions of the world or on cross-disciplinary issues (for instance, non-proliferation); around 400

«common actions» providing for the mobilisation of various resources (financial, human and so forth) to achieve a concrete goal (for instance, the peacekeeping operations in the former Yugoslavia<sup>4</sup>); and three «common strategies» towards Russia, Ukraine and the Mediterranean, to which we also need to add the more global «European Security Strategy» adopted in 2003. Convergence among national policies has also been sought by setting common goals (for instance, in the field of military capability). All of these tools «bind member states both in their adoption of positions and in the performance of their actions», but the member states maintain the option of tinkering with their diplomatic choices if they consider it useful to do so. It is by using these tools that the EU has been able to play an active role in settling the Iranian crisis or in responding to the Arab spring; but they are of little use in the face of the picture of disunity displayed when it came to intervening in Libya or in Syria...

Provided for under the Lisbon Treaty, the merger of the posts of High representative for foreign policy and of Commissioner for external relations is thus of an importance that is at once symbolic and concrete. This, on the one hand, because it imparts concrete substance to the will to mobilise the external policy elements already in place in the context of a more common foreign policy. And on the other, because it is accompanied by the establishment of an "European External Action Service" under the aegis of the High representative, which includes diplomats from the Council, the Commission and the member states, both in Brussels and in the EU's "embassies." This joint work is designed to contribute to the emergence of a common diplomatic culture and to facilitate the convergence of national foreign policies. Even if "Sister Ashton" sees no concrete results at this stage, it is as though we had hoped to rectify, twenty years on, a move that consisted in defining major goals without having the concrete means to achieve them - in other words, as though we had "placed the cart before the horse".

## 2. Going beyond "Europe space", an increased responsibility for the partisans of "Europe power"

Above and beyond these institutional mechanisms, we need to revive the debate on the EU's foreign policy at the "superstructure" level, in other words in terms of the representations of member states and their citizens. To achieve this, it is always enlightening to return to Zbigniew Brzezinski's formula whereby *"through the construction of Europe, France seeks reincarnation and Germany hopes for redemption"*. This formula effectively highlights the singular nature of the French rationale based on the projection of power at a higher level, which General de Gaulle theorised in his day by describing Europe as an "Archimedes' lever."

It was often said at the turn of the century that Germany had waved good-bye to its historic inhibitions with the advent of a finally "decomplexed" Republic of Berlin. But it is easy to note how this great European country is still essentially devoted to a kind of economic mercantilism and remains reluctant to engage in military operations abroad. Nor is the situation much more favourable for countries belonging to the other two major rationales that characterise national membership of the European construction process<sup>5</sup>: the "optimisation rationale" embodied in particular by the former European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries, which prompts them to modulate their involvement in the Community (including in its diplomacy) as a function of their various interests; and the "sublimation rationale" which is typical of those countries that expressed a heartfelt wish to join the EEC, then later the EU, because it was synonymous for them with the transition to democracy, to stability and to prosperity.

Aside from their differences, the four major national rationales at work within the EU have *de facto* converged around the goal of a European space for peace and prosperity. Closely bound to the French approach, and above and beyond all partisan differences, the European power project does not play so active a role in other national projects with regard to the construction of Europe. This does not mean that such a project cannot be pursued in an optimisation rationale, of course, as we can see from the role played by the United Kingdom in the diplomatic and military spheres. But it does highlight the fact that its implementation is not one of the *raison d'être* behind national membership of the EU in the view of a very large number of member states - although naturally, no member state is

indifferent to the increased clout accruing to it therefrom on the international stage.

In this context, countries and political forces that wish to promote the concept of "Europe as a power" have a particular responsibility, which they must exercise without confining themselves to simply faulting reluctant member states in a sterile manner or turning a blind eye to their own inconsistencies.

First of all, they need to resort to "differentiation", in other words they need to commit with determination to international cooperations embracing only a handful of EU member states. The European treaties provide for "enhanced cooperations" mobilising at least nine member states. One of the three such cooperations already launched provides for the establishment of a tax on financial transactions. The treaties also provide for "permanent structured cooperations" in the defence sphere, but for the moment they are still a dead letter in that area. Yet the most significant actions in the diplomatic and military spheres have been implemented within a limited framework, whether Community-based or otherwise: the Franco-German Brigade, the Eurocorps, the "Athena" mechanism for sharing common costs during external operations, the basically Franco-British military mobilisation seen during the operation in Libya and the basically French military mobilisation with European logistical support during the operation in Mali, or the creation of European Aeronautic Defense and Space company (EADS) in the defence industry... We must continue to press on in the furrow of these limited-framework cooperations rather than deploring the inertia of one or other member state, or indeed of a majority of them.

The more the promoters of Europe as a power also succeed in overcoming some of their own inconsistencies, the more effective they will be: this is true especially of France, and in particular of the French Left. The first inconsistency, which is strategic in nature, has recently been overcome: in fully rejoining the North-Atlantic Trade Organisation (NATO) structures, the French authorities have basically admitted that it was very difficult to work to empower the EU on the international stage while maintaining its distance from the United States, an ally of the utmost importance to a majority of the other member states. The second inconsistency is diplomatic in nature: while France is often in the forefront of those clamouring for more CFSP, it also takes great care to defend its prerogatives as a "medium great power" with a permanent

seat on the United Nations Security Council, with a nuclear deterrent of its own and with the world's third largest diplomatic network. It is not so rare to hear French diplomats proclaim, as Gordon Brown once did, that nothing stands between their country and the world - which is not exactly the best way to attract the sympathies of their European partners... The third inconsistency is of an economic and social nature: it is difficult to call for the expansion of the EU's foreign policy if one feels ill at ease with the EU's two most solid component parts, namely its trade policy and its enlargement policy. Even though it may be legitimate or even desirable to seek to change the content of those policies, giving people the impression that one ignores them seems at the very least to be counter-productive, yet that is the perception that numerous European observers have of France.

### 3. A new and more enabling international situation?

In the light of all the above, we can probably find greater cause for hope regarding the development of a European foreign policy by taking a longer-term view.

It was possible to launch the European construction because the countries of Europe, which had been dominating the world for five centuries, lost their sway after World War II: this meant that their security now depended on two non-European powers, and it also gave the signal for decolonisation to get under way. Thus European construction's horizon was reconciliation, in an introverted rationale which the recent crisis in the euro zone took to a peak. At this juncture, its new horizon is globalisation, which demands a more extroverted approach in which unity is strength. And indeed opinion polls show that a majority of Europe's citizens in virtually every one of the EU's member states are in favour of more common foreign policy.

Sure enough, if the Europeans bother to conduct an in-depth analysis of the post-crisis world, they will note that, as Pascal Lamy so untiringly stresses<sup>6</sup>, 2012 will forever be the year when developing countries' output overtook the output of the so-called "industrially advanced" countries. And if they can care to look a generation ahead, they will note that there will no longer be a single European country in the "G8" group by then, and indeed those countries are already in a minority in the new "G20" group... In the shorter term, the Europeans will thus be able to note several significant developments: the United States' withdrawal as its focuses on Asia and hopes that the Europeans will

begin to shoulder a greater part of their own strategic destiny; the drop shadow of Russia, which is bringing an increasing amount of pressure to bear and doing its level best to "divide and rule"; the instability in its neighbouring countries, especially to the south; and the keen competition of the "emerging" countries, which dispute Euro-Atlantic domination and are developing their own power strategies served by strong authorities.

The EU is probably insufficiently armed at this stage to be able to cope with this new situation, given that it does not have the same tools available to it as the continent-sized nation states that are at once its partners and its competitors. European construction has largely been based on the will to bridle the potentially destructive force of national sovereignties; this has led to the establishment of a "shared sovereignty" the exercise of which is far more complex and more sluggish than the sovereignty of strongly centralised (and sometimes even authoritarian) countries. Thus a fully-fledged Copernican revolution is necessary in Europe in order to engineer a convergence between the strategic vision and the will to act together at the international level. A single emblematic example is sufficient to illustrate this: the countries of Europe have a choice between bending over backwards to defend a "national energy independence" that is effectively out of their reach, or acting together against the risks linked to a foreign energy dependence which they all share. That is the sense of the blueprint for a "European energy community" proposed by Jacques Delors and Jerzy Buzek<sup>7</sup> and, on a broader level, of all the analyses and recommendations that highlight the need to combine "global thought with European action"<sup>6</sup>.

The vigour of this increased European mobilisation on the external front will be all the greater if it can rest on a common social and political substratum: above and beyond their different traditions and situations, the people of Europe are in fact united by a development model which combines better than any other the objectives of economic efficiency, social cohesion and concern for the environment, all within a democratic framework. This development model today is being challenged by dynamics both internal (demographic decline in particular) and external. For the EU, simply projecting its values of peace and the rule of law into a wider world marked by the return of power interests and of *realpolitik* could prove insufficient to defend its citizens' material and cultural interests. However, persuading a significant fringe of European citizens that

it is therefore no longer a matter of simply "adapting to globalisation but of contributing to shape it", to use the formula coined by Laurent Cohen-Tanugi<sup>8</sup>, is a precondition for any real leap forward. This means that we cannot simply complain about the disadvantages of becoming a "large Switzerland", which certainly does not carry any weight on the global stage but where many Europeans would like to live (far more than the handful of tax exiles who do live there); but that we must demonstrate in far more concrete fashion how European peoples' interests and values are threatened by the way the world is developing, and how common strategies and actions could better defend and promote those interests and values.

## Conclusion

In these times of rising public debts, we may otherwise have to ultimately rely on the spur of budget constraints. Because while those constraints may initially lead to a reduction in defence spending and in operations abroad that would further weaken the European countries' influence, they should also prompt us to increasingly pool our actions, and to aim for greater economies of scale along the lines of those achieved by France and the United Kingdom in the nuclear sphere.

In this regard, it will be particularly interesting to examine the conclusions of the European Council in December 2013, devoted to defence issues, which may well spawn new initiatives, including in the industrial sphere. Even though the German, British and French authorities' present situation is not especially favourable, there can be no doubt that this European Council will offer us a new and enlightening test in the long march towards the gradual affirmation of a more European foreign policy.

1. This Tribune is the English version of an article published in « *La Revue Socialiste* » in December 2013.

2. The failure of the Copenhagen Summit in Climate change has illustrated the EU's difficulties in terms of agenda setting at the global stage.

3. On this issue, see Zaki Laidi, *La norme sans la force - L'énigme de la puissance européenne*, Presses de Sciences Po, 2008.

4. Since 2003, the EU has launched 24 missions on three continents, including 17 civil operations and 7 military operations, deploying around 20 000 people.

5. In connection with these issues, see Yves Bertoncini and Thierry Chopin, *Politique européenne. Etats, pouvoirs et citoyens de l'UE*, Collection Amphis, Presses de Sciences-Po et Dalloz, 2010.

6. See for instance Pascal Lamy, "Leading Europe from the Front", *Tribune, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*, June 2013.

7. See Sami Andoura, Leigh Hancker, Marc Van der Woude and Jacques Delors, "Towards a European Energy Community: a political project", *Studies & Reports n° 76, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*, March 2010.

8. See "Think Global - Act European IV - Thinking Strategically about the EU's External Action", ed. Elvire Fabry, *Studies & Reports n° 96, Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute*, April 2013. In connection with these issues, see Laurent Cohen-Tanugi, "Beyond Lisbon : a European Strategy for Globalization", With a Preface by Christine Lagarde and Xavier Bertrand, Peter Lang, Brussels, 2008

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