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The Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy

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Just a few days after the Brexit referendum, the EU heads of state and government welcomed the "Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy". The document, which CFSP High Representative Federica Mogherini spent a year preparing, reads as yet another declaration of intent, calling for greater unity in the CFSP. It argues for what is at first glance an astonishingly defensive foreign policy orientation revolving around the concept of resilience. The upshot is a boost to transatlantic security relations, especially between the EU and NATO.

On 28 June 2016 the European Union unveiled its new Global Strategy for its foreign and security policy, adopting it as the normative framework for the future orientation of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The team of authors led by Nathalie Tocci, Deputy Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali, built the strategy around the concept of resilience, in the sense of enhancing the EU's ability to withstand internal and external threats. The document, which is not legally binding, replaces the European Security Strategy of 2003. A "strategy" is generally understood as "a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim" (Oxford Dictionaries). This document, however, largely lacks the core features of a strategy: a clearly stated objective, a defined (longer) timeframe, and a methodical approach. We read that the EU is to work for peace, security, prosperity, democracy and a rules-based world order. The five priorities named for the EU's external action are unsurprising: First of all, the CFSP is to improve the Union's security, specifically referring to measures addressing terrorism, hybrid threats, climate change, and energy security. As well as improving its defence capabilities, the document calls for the EU to step up its efforts in the area of cybersecurity and strategic communications. Secondly, the CFSP should seek to strengthen the resilience of states and societies in the eastern and southern neighbourhood and stabilise fragile state structures there. Thirdly, a "comprehensive approach to conflicts and crises" is to be prepared, based on "broad, deep and durable regional and international partnerships". Fourthly, the EU should make use of its experience with the peace-promoting effects of the integration process to support regional orders across the globe. And fifthly, through the

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CFSP framework, the EU should advance the process of reforming global governance based on international law, in order to ensure respect for human rights and the principles of sustainable development, and to ensure "lasting access to the global commons".

With the Global Strategy the EU is responding to a sea-change in Europe's overall political situation: collapsing states in the neighbourhood, international terrorism, Russia's growing aggression in Eastern Europe and growing fears in Poland and the Baltic states that elements of "hybrid" warfare could be used to destabilise European societies. Hybrid threats are characterised by a mixture of coercion and subversion, with conventional and unconventional methods used by state and non-state actors – without crossing the threshold to an officially declared war. In parallel to these trends, voices within the EU increasingly question its effectiveness as a level of political action. Not least the tangible possibility that the United Kingdom will likely complete its departure _from the Union by turning its back on the EU's joint arms procurement efforts raises the question whether the EU is in fact in any position to organise defence in and around Europe.

The EU Strategy and Criticisms of the Resilience Concept

The Global Strategy's responses to the challenges laid out above are full of ambiguities and unclarities. According to Michael Hanisch from the Bundesakademie für Sicherheitspolitik, the analytical concept of resilience – which is central to the document (thirty-four mentions) – denotes a "capacity for resistance and regeneration" or "crisis-resistance" in situations of disaster and emergency. In security research the term is used to describe both the reactive capacity to respond to harm and the underlying ability to endure disaster. The Global Strategy sets high standards for the resilience of the EU member states and their neighbours. It understands resilience as a broad concept that includes "all individuals and the whole of society". A resilient society is defined as democratic, based on sustainable development and trust in institutions. According to the Global Strategy, a resilient Union is characterised by the ability to exert stabilising effects on its neighbours and to reform the structures of global governance such that they are in a position to secure access to the global commons. Security research goes further, understanding resilience as both the ability to repel attack and endure and repair damage, as well as the ability to create structures that prevent such attacks and harm occurring in the first place. In order to achieve that state, the strategy argues, a comprehensive approach that integrates all relevant stakeholders is required.

This exceptionally broad approach is not unproblematic. Michael Hanisch rightly queries its benefits: "If everything and everyone is supposed to be resilient, where is the added value?" It is neither clear how far the concept extends, nor what recommendations for action can be derived from it. Jochen Steinhilber of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung sees the resilience paradigm as a "mantra" that threatens to become "an alternative to transformative approaches". Sinan Ülgen of Carnegie Europe at least attributes the concept the potential to overcome the contradiction between promoting stability and fostering democracy in third states. The resilience model, he argues, represents a leap forward, leaving behind the EU's transformation approach. But what strategic interests should the EU pursue beyond creating stability? Goals (political stability) are often confused with interests (such as energy security). The European Council has instructed the High Representative, the Commission and the Council to "take the work forward". Where the interests of the European Union itself are not clearly defined, it will be no easy task to align the approximately thirty existing sub-strategies of external action with the concept of resilience.

Terminological Unclarities

A series of other terms appear in the Global Strategy, whose analytical vagueness reinforces the impression of strategic indetermination in the CFSP and CSDP. There is talk of a "principled pragmatism" directing the strategy's implementation, but without defining it in any detail. The EU is charged with achieving "strategic autonomy". "Defence cooperation" should be "the norm", but without any convincing description of how this grand ambition is to be achieved under conditions of resource scarcity, strategic discord between the member states and continuing adherence to consensus in decision-making. The two proposed measures are unconvincing. Mogherini advises a "networked" approach that covers all policy areas and seeks to connect internal and external security policy. The question of what procedure would permit such far-reaching intervention in the political powers of the member states remains unanswered. The second procedural recommendation found in the strategy is that all the possibilities of the Treaty of Lisbon should be exhausted. These include enhanced cooperation in the CFSP and permanent structured cooperation in the CSDP. The coordinating function of the European Defence Agency in arms and defence procurement is also mentioned. The proposal to create a solid European defence industry is a goal already energetically pursued by the Juncker Commission via measures to promote research in the defence industry. At the same time it is also noted that member states naturally remain "sovereign in their defence decisions".

This combination of analytical imprecision and extremely ambitious political objectives (such as "strategic autonomy") inevitably poses the question of the strategy's actual utility and political orientation. Without a comprehensive European foreign and security policy, including a defence union with qualified majority decision-making, the objective of "strategic autonomy" remains worthless. One promising route was laid out in 2005–2010 with the Hague Programme for "strengthening freedom, security and justice in the European Union". So why produce an analytically vague document whose goals are unrealistic? Closer examination of the paper and consideration of the geopolitical context in which it appeared, however, permit another interpretation: The EU is only one pillar – and far from an autonomous one – in a European security architecture that also encompasses NATO, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, to name but the most important instances. It is an obvious conclusion that the EU's future resilience efforts should concentrate on civil emergency response while military action is conducted in the scope of transatlantic cooperation in close collaboration with NATO.

A New Relationship between EU and NATO

In view of persistent strategic discord and the conviction that greater integration of the United States into European security policy is imperative, the European Council, meeting on 28 June in the presence of NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg, decided to further deepen relations between NATO and the European Union. In advance of the NATO summit on 8/9 July, US President Barack Obama met specially with Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker and EU Council President Donald Tusk. It is therefore unsurprising that the Warsaw NATO Summit decided to deepen cooperation with the Union. The cooperation project builds on the Berlin Plus agreement of 2003 and seeks to strengthen the European pillar of NATO. Both sides have agreed on accelerated cooperation in selected areas, including defence against hybrid threats and cyber-attack, military assistance for third states, and maritime security. They also intend to cooperate more closely on intelligence matters, cyber-defence planning and the creation of resilient critical infrastructures.

A large part of the Global Strategy is also dedicated to transatlantic relations and

NATO's resurgent importance for Europe. It speaks of "deepening the transatlantic bond" (page 4), of NATO remaining "the primary framework for most Member States" (20), and member states' defence planning and capacity development being conducted "in full coherence with NATO's defence planning process" (46). A number of recent comments on the Strategy point to the connection between internal EU reforms and transatlantic cooperation. Sven Biscop sees the strengthening of coordination within the Union as a precondition for any form of meaningful cooperation with the United States. Ivo Daalder even speaks – under the impression of Brexit – of a "defining moment" in transatlantic cooperation. And according to Daniel Keohane, the Global Strategy underlines that NATO remains the principal anchor of European defence and security.

All this leads to the conclusion that the concept of resilience – upon which the Strategy concentrates so strongly – ultimately serves little purpose beyond concealing the CFSP's fundamental repositioning in relation to NATO. In future it will no longer be possible to conceive Europe's overall foreign and security policy as a European alternative to transatlantic security cooperation. The European Union's "Global Strategy" has been given a defensive military orientation, for which the resilience concept stands as shorthand. However, this reservation must be interpreted in the context of the simultaneous intention to tie the CFSP closer to NATO. From this perspective the resilience concept very quickly loses its apparently pathbreaking relevance for the underlying orientation of the Global Strategy. Instead it is better understood as an expression of a new division of labour between NATO and CFSP, where Europe ties itself much more closely to NATO and concentrates its real defence efforts within the Alliance. As such, Europe setting the stage for a "security community" where the Union takes responsibility for civil resilience, while NATO creates the superstructure for Europe's military defence.