

# Working Paper

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## **Membership, neighbourhood, partnership**

**The EU's foreign policy triptych needs  
remodelling**

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# Contents

Membership and Enlargement: Stay the Course.....	3
<i>Consolidation and the Limits of Enlargement</i> .....	3
<i>Strict Conditionality vs. Differentiated Membership</i> .....	4
Neighbourhood Policy: Redesign Framework and Refine Ambitions .....	5
<i>Time Horizon</i> .....	5
<i>Level of Ambition and Vision</i> .....	5
<i>Bilateral, Regional, and Multilateral Approaches</i> .....	6
<i>Framework</i> .....	7
Partnership: Reset and Engage More Consistently .....	7
<i>Concept</i> .....	7
<i>G8 and NATO</i> .....	8
<i>US and Russia</i> .....	9
<i>Norms and Emerging Powers</i> .....	10
<i>Improvements inside the EU</i> .....	11
<i>Gymnich</i> .....	11
Conclusions .....	12

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Membership, neighbourhood, and partnership – these three approaches form the EU’s foreign policy triptych. For decades its centre piece had been membership. Through the expansion of its membership since 1973 and notably after the fall of the iron curtain the EC/EU has changed the political map of post-war Europe and contributed to peace and prosperity on the continent.<sup>1</sup> However we sense that “the time is approaching when it will be no longer possible to cite enlargement as the EU’s most successful foreign policy”.<sup>2</sup> The focus of European foreign policy is shifting to the turbulent Southern neighbourhood around the Mediterranean and the “awkward neighbours” in the East. To approach these diverse countries the EU uses a set of instruments and established a comprehensive political framework called ENP that, so far, has not developed into an effective foreign policy. For reasons of its own security but also to improve its reputation as a driver for a “fairer, safer and more united world”<sup>3</sup>, the EU needs to care more for its “own geography”. Even more important for the future of the EU as an international actor and for the well-being of its citizens might be the building of partnerships, i.e. strategic relationships with emerging powers in Asia and the Americas. The rise of powerful and large economies like China and India, Brazil and Mexico, and their determination to have a say in shaping the international order and global governance make them indispensable partners for cooperation. While the EU has understood the secular importance of these power shifts, it is slow and inconsistent in its foreign policy response. Thus, the EU’s foreign policy triptych needs remodelling. A new centre piece consists of a comprehensive long-term engagement with Eastern neighbours and a respectful cooperation with the Southern neighbours as well as effective relationships with emerging powers and like-minded allies. It must be flanked and enveloped by a more integrated and strategic foreign and security policy of an almost completed EU-28. It follows from this, that both ENP and the so-called strategic partnerships must be revised to become more successful.

## **Membership and Enlargement: Stay the Course**

In principle, a rethinking of the membership concept as established in article 49 TEU and strengthened by practical policy could start with a revision of the “renewed consensus on enlargement”<sup>4</sup> reached in 2006. Its key elements were the consolidation of the membership perspective for European countries, the application of strict conditionality as far as fulfilling of membership criteria for candidates are concerned and better communication with the civil societies in the EU and applicant countries.

## **Consolidation and the Limits of Enlargement**

To redefine the first element, “consolidation”, would mean that the EU renounces the limitation of its political commitment to take in the countries of the Western Balkans, Turkey, Iceland and other EFTA countries as new members. Living up to this commitment would lead – over the next decades or so – to an EU-36. This alone would certainly cause some political headache in terms of securing a legitimate and effective Union. In particular, the accession of Turkey would mean a real blow to the political vision of an ever closer Union and would certainly have important implications for a Union

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. the reasoning expressed by the Norwegian Nobel Committee on awarding the Nobel Peace Prize 2012 to the EU: “The union and its forerunners have for over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe.” Press release: Oslo, 12 October 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. David Allen (2012): *The Common Foreign and Security Policy*, in: Erik Jones/Anand Menon/Stephen Weatherhill (eds.): *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union*, Oxford, pp. 643-658, here p. 648.

<sup>3</sup> Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy: *Providing Security in a Changing World*. Brussels: 11 December 2008, Council Document S407/08, here p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> European Council: Presidency Conclusions of 14/15 December 2006, Council document 16879/1/06, Brussels, 12/2/2007.

that borders the turbulent countries of the Middle East and Southern Caucasus. One option is to let enlargement phase out after the accession of Croatia in 2013. This “fading out option” makes an official declaration to stop enlargement unnecessary. The alternative option would be to extend the political commitment to the countries in the Eastern neighbourhood and thus explicitly acknowledge their aspiration to join on the basis of article 49 TEU. It is highly unlikely that the EU will come up with a Thessaloniki-type of declaration which states that the future of the countries of the so-called Eastern Partnership lies with integration into the EU.<sup>5</sup> Irrespective of how likely it is that the EU will follow one or the other option, both can be regarded as worse than staying the course, which is, as indicated, already a tall order. This is not only because the EU struggles with the deep crisis in the Eurozone and sets out to an overhaul of institutions, procedures, and policies. It is also because enlargement as a preferred foreign policy instrument is losing its effectiveness when applied vis-à-vis the Eastern European countries. It remains to be seen whether the EU’s transformative power will be sufficient with regard to the current problematic candidates from Montenegro to Turkey.

### **Strict Conditionality vs. Differentiated Membership**

This brings us to the conditionality element of enlargement policy. The trend towards toughening criteria and stricter control of practical implementation of obligations in the candidate countries is apparent. However, time and again, overriding political considerations prevailed in the EU and led to early entry, as was the case with Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. While it might be worthwhile that the EU defines more explicitly the political criteria of membership in a substantial and not only formal way, it would be disproportionate if the EU asked for more than the maximum of taking over the full *acquis*.

The alternative option is, of course, to be less demanding and allow sub-standard countries to become members of a lesser kind. Understandingly, candidates that realise that they cannot or do not want to meet the strict criteria within a medium-term, support this claim for a discount-membership. The debate is moreover fuelled by current trends towards greater internal differentiation and discussions about multi-speed integration. While it is an open question in how far and under which terms a second class or tailor-made membership is attractive for candidates, it is not self-evident that more differentiation inside the EU offers new options for outsiders. The EU could indeed overstretch the instrument of transition periods and thus establish a series of opt-outs (e.g. from EMU or Schengen, but certainly not the single market or competition policy) for newcomers. But the fortress and red line has always been the full and equal representation of all members in the institutions and their participation in the decision-making process. A variable geometry or modular participation, in particular in the EP and the Commission is not in sight.

A real second class or specific type of membership would demand that the EU defines this status in terms of rights and obligations for those who wish to join. It could develop a second track for them including specific provisions for negotiations, specific membership criteria etc. and would have to change the treaties respectively. Opening this Pandora’s box might be the welcome invitation for incumbent members like the UK to renegotiate their terms of membership. Taking these complications into account, it seems reasonable that applicant countries continue to be bound to take over the EU’s full legal and political *acquis*. In other words, the EU should stay its course with regards to membership and enlargement.

<sup>5</sup> See for instance the opposition of key members, like Germany, to include a respective ambition in the association agreement with Ukraine.

## Neighbourhood Policy: Redesign Framework and Refine Ambitions

As a consequence, the EU should not turn its attention inwards, but invest more political energy in new arrangements with neighbouring countries along the lines of cooperation, association, and integration without membership. The uprisings in the Arab world and the stagnation of transformation in the Eastern neighbourhood have in different ways shown the irrelevance of the EU as a foreign policy actor and the limits of its transformative power. From its origins, ENP was very much influenced by the perceived success of enlargement without considering properly how different conditions, ambitions, and capacities were between the so-called ENP countries and the former candidates of Central and Eastern Europe. In the South, the approach of “enlargement light” never had a basis in reality. Given this background, the EU has neglected to give a substantial CFSP dimension to ENP or to accompany ENP by determinedly working on the unresolved conflicts in the regions concerned. To make ENP work at all, the EU must intensify its neighbourhood diplomacy, namely, its contributions to conflict settlement.

As a result of reviewing the ENP, the EU did not come up with a redesign of the political framework or a new ENP in 2012. The EU recalls the established principles (differentiation, performance-driven benefits) and puts more emphasis on the normative aspects, like the development of sustainable democratic structures, and more support for more reforms in state, society and economy. However, this recent review will not put an end to conceptual thinking on ENP. Besides, the developments in the neighbouring countries themselves are reshaping ENP in a very practical way, too. Four dimensions of ENP shall be discussed here: (1) the time horizon, (2) the level of ambition, (3) the mix of bilateral and regional approaches, and (4) the overall framework.

### Time Horizon

The EU must be clear about the long-term character of its engagement with the neighbours. In general, this corresponds well with the offers and concepts of the EU like association, DCFTA, institution building etc. However, initially the EU was implicitly expecting linear developments and faster results, at least in the East, that have been frustrated. With the exception of Moldova, the political development in the five other countries of the Eastern Partnership is stagnant or even shows a roll-back. The uprisings in the South were by no means induced by the EU nor does “Europe” serve as the point of orientation and aspiration for the people in the transition countries. To go for a PHARE programme is not on the agendas on either side. Many countries of the Southern neighbourhood are in a state of fragile transition that makes it difficult for the EU to engage in more than ad hoc cooperation with new actors in government, parties, and civil societies. In cases like Egypt, the two sides must find a new agreement about the objectives and agenda of cooperation. Therefore, a reset of the relationships with the Southern countries is needed, either because of sweeping changes of the regime and political actors or because the EU has to bring its relations with reluctant reformers (Morocco, Jordan, Algeria) in line with the normative guidelines of ENP. All this needs time and annual progress reports should take this into account and monitor also small step developments in a critical and transparent way.

### Level of Ambition and Vision

Considering the long-term approach, the EU must also define its level of ambition in a realistic and differentiated way. The level is dependent on the collective interest of the EU. Interests mostly concern security, ensured by well-governed countries, and are also economic, namely in the energy sector.

The political vision of “Europe as whole and free” has lost much of its impetus. The interplay of EU, (NATO,) the Council of Europe and the OSCE has neither been determined nor successful with regard to building a European security architecture or something like a political security community.<sup>6</sup> Russia is now opening a new stage with the initiative for a Eurasian Union which shows the ambition to parallel or even compete with the EU as the centre of political and economic gravity on the continent.<sup>7</sup> Given its foreign policy identity, the EU cannot and shall not enter into a realist power game with Russia over spheres of influence in the “common neighbourhood”. But it must be consistently seeking to refine conditionality in order to relate its offers directly to the responsiveness and performance of the partner country.<sup>8</sup> Moreover the EU could think of introducing a kind of privileged relationship with neighbours by elaborating a new status and agreement based on article 8 TEU (Neighbours of the Union). This would lift the political status and prestige and could reward reform countries with integration without membership.

The Ukraine case indicates that the EU should also be prepared to scale down on pace and offers and be more selective. Comprehensive frameworks like the DCFTA or the new agreement with Russia and convergence as the guiding principle are maximalist positions that do not work in the current state. Therefore, the EU must tone down a bit on the perspectives and ambitions.

In the South, the visions of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership or Union for the Mediterranean have always been artificial without much political support. However, the EU needs some form of engagement with such a turbulent region where the EU is only one actor among others that have more influence. The power of attraction in conservative-Islamic countries is certainly less than in Eastern Europe as far as views on democracy, pluralism, role of religion, and way of life etc. are concerned. While the population in Eastern Europe is ageing, the Southern neighbours have a young population, however, with low levels of education and dim perspectives on the labour markets. Their interest in modernisation might be the strongest motive for engaging more with the EU in the areas of technical assistance, institution building, economic and trade policy, and, of course, labour mobility. While the EU wants to strengthen conditionality in its “more for more” approach it must be more subtle and piecemeal in practice.

## **Bilateral, Regional, and Multilateral Approaches**

Over the last years of creeping disappointment, the EU has placed more and more emphasis on bilateral relations which form their backbone. This is reflected by binding contractual relationships. While attempts at region-building neither worked in the East nor in the South, incentives and demands for multilateral cooperation within a variable geometry of countries are important to tackle sectoral problems or develop trans-border projects but also to underpin the EU’s efforts to solve conflicts between and within the neighbouring countries. Therefore, the Eastern Partnership summits and meetings at ministerial as well as the working levels need constant commitment by the EU as long as this neighbourhood cooperation is not yet self-sustaining. But the EU should work further towards this regional spill-over. It might also be worthwhile to reconsider and bring back the concept of “reconciliation” into the political process and political dialogue with the neighbouring countries and share respective experience.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Margarete Klein/Solveig Richter (2012): Choosing Cooperation over Conflict: Russia and the Euro-Atlantic Security Order. Berlin: SWP Comment 2012/C 10.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Uwe Halbach (2012): Vladimir Putin’s Eurasian Union: A New Integration Project for the CIS Region? Berlin: SWP Comments 2012/C 01.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Kai-Olaf Lang/Barbara Lippert (2012): The EU and its Neighbours: A Second Chance to Marry Democratisation and Stability. Berlin: SWP Comments 2012/C 02.

## Framework

It can be expected that, in the course of practical relations, more differentiation between Eastern and Southern neighbours might develop anyway. The establishment of ENP as a single policy framework for East and South was always for internal reasons as a way of balancing the different interests, preferences, and claims within the EU and between member states. Therefore, a straight-forward dissolution is politically unwise and does not help. More important is that this single framework does not prevent the EU and, in particular, the Commission/EEAS from doing what it wants to do in respect to the very heterogeneous countries.

While the US will remain an important player in the Middle East and interested in the developments in Eastern Europe, the shift to take over more responsibility for its own geography will force the EU to adjust its “cooperative responsibility scheme” and thus, act where it can make a difference towards a “secure Europe in a better world”<sup>9</sup>, thereby, trying to fill the gaps which arise from such a shift in attention and/or power.

## Partnership: Reset and Engage More Consistently

Effective relationships with emerging powers and like-minded allies are a particularly patchy and multi-coloured part of the EU’s foreign policy triptych. As far as the importance within a European global strategy is concerned, it must become the centre piece alongside the neighbourhood. Moreover, there are reasons for a redraft of the concept of “strategic partnerships” within a differentiated approach.

## Concept

The EU has frequently proclaimed strategic partnerships and used the label in many communications, published on its own part or together with the respective partners. It has, however, so far failed to clearly define the concept.<sup>10</sup> This voluntarism corresponds with the political intention to predominantly recognise the significance of others symbolically as well as with the willingness to cooperate more intensely, no matter what the current state of the relations and the overall level of ambition look like. Nevertheless, we recommend four characteristics that a more specifically defined concept of strategic partnerships should include: (1) Aligned action in fields of co-operation or towards other actors, (2) which comprises shared political intentions and goals, (3) is ideally based on a common set of rights and duties, and (4) is contingent upon specific rules of exclusivity that prevent a state of competition between the EU and its partners.<sup>11</sup>

This four-point catalogue emphasises target-oriented action; a pre-defined degree of institution-alisation of the relations in question is, however, not an obligatory feature of the partnership. Measured against this set of rules, Canada, the US, and Japan most neatly fit into that category. They are in addition unified by the fact that they – different to China, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa or India –

<sup>9</sup> European Security Strategy (*ESS*), Council document 15895/03, Brussels: 12 December 2003.

<sup>10</sup> As of 2012, the EU has devised such partnerships with (year generally in accordance with the respective summit): Russia (1999), USA, Japan, Canada, China (2003), India (2004), South Africa (2006) Brazil (2007), Mexico (2008), and South Korea (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Following Günther Maihold (2009): “Strategische Partnerschaften” und schwacher Interregionalismus: Die Beziehungen zwischen Brasilien und der EU, in: Annegret Bendiek/Heinz Kramer (eds.): *Globale Außenpolitik der Europäischen Union, Interregionale Beziehungen und „strategische Partnerschaften“*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, S. 19-208, here p. 194f; also cf. Giovanni Grevi (2008): *The rise of strategic partnerships: between interdependence and power politics*, in: *ibid./Álvaro de Vasconcelos (ed.): Partnerships for effective multilateralism: EU relations with Brazil, China, India and Russia*. Paris: ISS Chaillot Paper No 109, 5 June 2008, pp. 145-172.

do not question the legitimacy of the existing multilateral organisations and formats of global governance, which only reflect an obsolete international balance of power. In fact, the EU has appeared as being in favour of reforming the structures of international governance; yet, it cannot rely on a credible joint position with regard to this matter, not least because of the exceptional role of Great Britain and France as permanent members of the United Nations Security Council.

Hence, the EU requires a convincing concept for dealing with relevant countries. On the one hand, because this “codification” corresponds with its internal structures and with its policy style. On the other, because it has asserted enormous pressure on itself to meet the raised expectations, mainly, by frequently recurring to the label. This means, that the Union needs a concept that it can actually live up to, and that closes the gap between rhetoric and capability. The internal added value of a (re-)conceptualisation of its partnerships could be that all involved parties (member states, HR etc.) would reconsider what the thematic priorities and the common positions should be, and under what responsibilities the respective tasks should fall. Herman Van Rompuy’s often-cited request: “We have strategic partners, now we need a strategy”<sup>12</sup>, shows, that until now neither the internal processes nor the according communication with the target-countries have taken place.

## G8 and NATO

The quality and intensity of relations to countries that the EU classifies as “strategic” vary substantially. At the same time, the uniform labelling as “strategic partners” blurs the distinction between G8 and NATO partners of the EU and its member states on the one hand, and the relations to emerging powers on the other, which is, in contrast, clearly discernible in actual policy-making. Similar to the German Federal Government, which released its concept for the “new global policy shapers”<sup>13</sup>, it would be advisable for the EU to pay particular political attention to the interaction with medium-sized and major powers and to underpin it accordingly. Such confinement of the EU’s strategic partnerships to the emerging countries would have the potential to make use of the established relations with traditional partners such as the US, Canada and Japan as a platform and starting point for the dealings with the emerging powers.<sup>14</sup> To continue subsuming the relations with the US, but also with Canada and Japan, under the label of strategic partnerships, does impede on the intensity and intimacy that characterise these relations. The EU frequently consults with these partners on substantial foreign and security policy issues, e.g. in the context of NATO. The partners also continue to discuss global economic and financial developments within the G8 framework. It would make sense, for instance, to consider a strengthened role of the EU in these forums. The EU-NATO relations are complicated by the national reservations of Greece and Turkey. In this context, a renewed trial to advance the relations on a political level is considered promising. The EU is already well integrated into the framework of the G8. It should be reviewed, however, to assign a more influential role to the EU Commission in the run-up to the internal meetings of the G8 members Germany, France, Italy, and Great Britain.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> President of the European Council, Herman van Rompuy: EU External Relations, Council Document PCE 186/10, Brussels, 14 September 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Federal Foreign Office of Germany (ed.) (2012): *Shaping globalization – Expanding partnerships – Sharing responsibility*. Strategy paper by the Federal Government, Berlin („Gestaltungsmächte Konzept“). Contrary to the translation of the Federal Foreign Office as “new powers in shaping globalization“, we find the denotation as “new global policy shapers“ better suited.

<sup>14</sup> Arguing along these lines is, for instance: Stefan Fröhlich (2012): *The New Geopolitics of Transatlantic relations*. Coordinated Responses to Common Dangers, Washington: John Hopkins University Press.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. suggestions in : Julia Lieb/Nicolai von Ondarza/Daniela Schwarzer (2011): *The European Union in International Fora*. Lessons for the Union’s External Representation after Lisbon. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft.

## US and Russia

Within the G8, the relations to the US and to Russia stand out, mainly with regard to their politico-strategic significance and to the density of interaction. Both countries represent without a doubt “special cases” in the relations of the EU to its officially declared strategic partners. Russia is on one part not an emerging power, but shares the characteristics of down-turning industrial states in view of the development of demographics, economy, and society. Different to the US, on the other part, Russia is not an ally in the military sense or with respect to basic values such as democracy and the rule of law. Nonetheless, Russia as a geographically European country can principally come under deliberation for EU membership. In view of this complicated neighbourhood and the politico-institutional melange, the EU has been in search of a specific approach towards the Russian Federation since 1991. The main components of this are the manifold expressions of political association and economic integration. Here, the EU works towards converging objectives, in consideration of a (pan-European) inclusion of Moscow. The Kremlin’s aspirations to make Russia yet another centre of gravity besides the EU are eyed critically from Brussels, since such developments could ultimately lead to a hegemonic reconstruction of the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Taking into account the options, that the implementation of the above-mentioned four criteria of a strategic partnership may offer, the EU would no longer have to emphasise the major EU-Russia treaties and the Common Spaces with their pan-European connotations. It seems all the more appropriate to offer Russia a strategic partnership in the narrow sense and to put further going ambitions with view to the EU-Russia relations under critical scrutiny.

The relations of the EU to the US, embedded into the transatlantic relations, are relevant, especially for the emerging powers: The more the EU appears as the junior partner, the less significant is its strength with regard to the emerging powers. The more symmetry and recognisable labour and/or burden sharing there is between the EU and the US, the more clearly the EU’s autonomy and influence are appreciated. The bilateral relations between the EU and the US continue to lack the strength and the solidarity to absorb or compensate the incremental marginalisation of NATO and the foreign policy re-orientation of the US to the Asia-Pacific. It is the EU’s task to counter this dilution, especially, when it is searching for a coordinated interaction with the emerging powers. The EU, hence, needs to invest more political energy into developing its relations with the emerging powers in Asia/ the Pacific, Latin America and Southern Africa. Particularly in view of its relations to Washington, the EU should consider proceeding like the German Federal Government; it has limited its relations to the so-called “new global policy shapers”, to countries that it does not collaborate with in the contexts of EU, NATO or G8.<sup>17</sup>

In its progress report on the strategic partnerships, HR Catherine Ashton proposed to the European Council in December 2010 to aim at “fewer priorities, greater coherence, more results”<sup>18</sup> for the future. This approach could endorse developments towards an aggregation of partner countries. Such systematisation of partners would imply for the actual implementation that the format, agenda, and frequency of meetings have to be determined *country-specifically*; moreover, these conventions should be held on a flexible and demand-oriented basis and at the highest political level. Developing “thematically focussed agendas” for the relations with the emerging powers could also advance this procedure effectively. These focussed agendas, e.g. renewed on an annual basis, could, in addition, help to coordinate the journeys of member states’ representatives into partner countries at an early stage. If the member states, which influence the partnership agenda and the priorities in

<sup>16</sup> Cf. among others Andrey Makarychev (2012): Russia – EU: Competing Logics of Region Building. DGAPanalyse. Berlin: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Auswärtige Politik e.V.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Federal Foreign Office of Germany (ed.) (2012): Strategy paper on the new global policy shapers, here p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> High Representative: Strategic Partners. Progress report for the European Council, 16-17 December 2010, available on: [http://www.europolitique.info/pdf/gratuit\\_fr/285183-fr.pdf](http://www.europolitique.info/pdf/gratuit_fr/285183-fr.pdf), last accessed: 24/9/2012; reference: European Council (Brussels): Meeting of 16/17 December 2010. Conclusions, EUCO 30/1/10, here Aspect 9.

the relations with emerging powers through the European Council, were able to adjust their national partnership agendas to those of the EU, enormous synergies could be generated. Besides, this procedure would underline that it will be more difficult for the partner countries to prefer bilateral relations with member states to those with the EU. Informal meetings and a result-oriented follow-up process at the working level would complement such a structured approach.<sup>19</sup>

### Norms and Emerging Powers

It is a relative strength of the EU that it can present itself as a long-term reliable partner with neither hegemonic aspirations nor capabilities. Since, contrary to the USA, the EU lacks the means to make up for shifts in attention on a visible and material level, as simply creating precedents through military manoeuvres, military bases or well staged summits and travelling diplomacy is insufficient. Yet, well allotted and in the sense of *smart power* the EU may strengthen its presence and commitment in these fields – in fact, to that extent, to which it has defined its interests. This is true regardless of the fact that the emerging medium-sized and major powers challenge the EU's self-image as the "power of the good". In many cases, countries like Mexico or Brazil do not have convincing alternatives to the EU as a strategic partner on a level playing field. This is at least true until China or India occupy a more benevolent and co-operative position in this regard and start to strive towards combining the potentials of the emerging powers, which could eventually lead to the implementation of their own policy formulations and political order. The EU continues to have an interest in winning the emerging powers as stakeholders of the existing model of order as well as of their norms and values. It would, therefore, have to defer to the cost-benefit considerations of the partner countries and thus convince them of the advantages of the established regime compared to the costs of creating alternative models or of obstructing the existing ones. The EU could sharpen its (foreign policy) profile by developing sub-strategies, i.e. strategies beneath the ESS for wider regions and individual countries, in its relations with important international powers. In this regard, Brussels should differentiate its partnerships along individual policy fields, but it should also – as can be discerned by the ASEAN example – test in how far an intensification of interregional dialogue may improve its policy shaping capacities. As the results of the individual country reports (country studies) show, the EU needs to understand, that it does neither hold a monopoly as an attractive actor nor does it automatically have a lead over others. A majority of its partners does not wish for a transfer of norms (values), on the contrary, on many topics they tend to see the EU as a rival rather than a model. It is this circumstance to which Brussels must react – an adjustment of its own demands in line with realistic objectives is necessary. However, a pragmatism of relations and a concentration of the agenda do not mean that the normative dimension should be entirely omitted; instead, norms should be insistently and reliably phrased and conveniently attached to the objectives of each cooperation. Ultimately, the external action of the EU should be improved through institutional adaptations, which all remain underneath the threshold of a treaty revision. Apart from intensifying coordination between national and European agendas and deliberately strengthening the EU delegations in all the targeted regions (countries), the member states in particular should critically assess the advantages, which might arise from "partnering" relations with distinctive countries to/with designated EU member states.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Stefan Lehne (2011): More Action, better Service. How to Strengthen the European External Service. Carnegie Endowment, Policy Outlook , here p. 12.

## Improvements inside the EU

In addition to creating more differentiation and hierarchy among the relations with partners, the EU authorities should also reconsider the role of individual member states in dealing with the emerging powers. Occasionally, the pursuit of national interests, predominantly in the areas of security and economic policies, thwarts EU action with regard to these countries. This ambiguity becomes especially clear in view of the human rights dialogues that the EU has tried to establish with Russia and China in particular; their impact has often been diminished when the member states favoured lucrative contracts to human rights. A way out of this dilemma could be to assign individual member states, or a core group of them, to elaborate the features of a strategic partnership. The biggest members, i.e. Germany, France and Great Britain, certainly play a distinct role in this regard. Even though these countries have divergent positions on a number of CFSP matters, their commitment has proven to be at the core of the success (or failure, respectively) of several EU foreign policy initiatives. The innovation to give individual member states the lead on single partnerships could, for instance, encourage the EU-3 to invest more into the actorness of the EU (e.g. their diplomatic resources, a commendable acceptance of the HR's primacy, a close coordination with her etc.). Another advantage of sharing these political responsibilities could be that this informal directorate is more appreciated by the remaining member states than the EU structures themselves. This applies especially when it contributes to the effective outward representation of interests as well as to the inward legitimacy, mainly through inclusive consultation and conciliation mechanisms. In order not to create pure "leadership by the biggest" in the EU's interactions with its strategic partners, it is an important task to integrate countries with an excellent foreign policy network, such as Italy, Poland or Sweden. Taken together, these propositions allude to the creation of moderated hierarchies and a stark differentiation of member states in foreign policy at the same time.

Another advantage of transferring the responsibility of these partnerships to one or more member states would finally be that the strategic thinking available in Europe's capitals could be used better and more systematically. It should also be in the interest of the HR that a more active role of the member states would feed expertise, commitment, and continuity into the relations with partner countries. If the HR were to actively pursue this institutional differentiation, she could obtain manifest synergies. Moreover, she could escape the merely hopeless competition with established member states. The proposal of a "strategic union" takes this line; at the core, it proclaims a coordination of EU action and the according member state policies.<sup>20</sup> Overall, the EU should, in due course, start revising its partnerships and move ahead in the process of internal adjustments, as it aims to prevail as a global actor in a multipolar constellation.

A final, and not necessarily opposed, approach would be to strengthen the elites of the foreign policy architecture specifically, and to fill posts with political heavyweights. These would, however, have to be supported by a constructive attitude of the large EU member states – as it was the case in the times of Javier Solana and Chris Patten. For this approach, it would also be distinctive to significantly bolster the EU delegations in the capitals of the strategic partners. All member states would be invited to delegate staff to EU delegations primarily, and to increase the number of staff in the national embassies at a second stage only. The approach to strengthen the EU's capacity to shape global relations would also be supported by pooling resources in the EEAS. Here it is crucial to define the interests of the EU towards the partners and to determine a clear agenda for the relations.

## Gymnich

Finally, the weak foreign and security policy component in the EU's relations with emerging powers could be advanced with the creation of a third Gymnich meeting, i.e. an informal convention of all

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Thomas Renard (2012): A strategic Union to cope with the multipolar challenge. Brussels: E!sharp.

EU foreign ministers, the HR and (selected) strategic partners.<sup>21</sup> Yet, this would require the “systematisation” of the partners first (see above), which would have to be treated individually and exclusively. A multilateral format would only be possible in exceptional cases, e.g. when group formation and identity building are desired. With a lot of summits being devoid of content, the question of the agenda is an important one to ask. A targeted opening of ministerial meetings of foreign affairs as well as other Council meetings (ECOFIN, Justice and Home Affairs, Energy) to major partners when dealing with issues of common interest would not be far to seek. The EU could even generate reciprocity by strengthening its presence in multilateral regional forums like ASEAN; at the same time, the presence of other regional organisations in EU forums could be tested. This step would reflect a return to the interregional dialogue that the EU cut back notably in the beginning of the 2000s, owing to the emphasis on the concept of strategic partnerships. Especially with a view to a possibly competitive relationship of China and the US in the Asia-Pacific, this approach could have significant advantages for the EU. Brussels would send a recognisable signal that it takes the problems of the region into appropriate consideration. The upheavals in Myanmar also pave the ground for a fresh start of the relations between the EU and ASEAN. Unlike in the past, the EU would not advertise its own integration model, but would support approaches to a regional security order or functional co-operation on both, the political and the practical level. This could form part of substantial and continually cherished bilateral relations, e.g. with Indonesia and India; a multiplier effect is likely.

## Conclusions

As shown in this paper, the traditional foreign policy triptych of the EU needs some strategic re-modelling. In order for the Union to become a more efficient actor in international affairs, we made three core recommendations: First, the EU should stay its course with regard to enlargement and adhere to the “renewed consensus” from 2006 with an emphasis on consolidation and conditionality. Second, the ENP should be equipped with a substantial CFSP dimension. The EU should formulate clear time horizons, define, and possibly lower, the level of ambition, emphasise the multilateral objective of the ENP, and consider the heterogeneity of the participating countries without throwing over the whole framework of ENP. Finally, the concept of the so-called “strategic partnerships” of the EU should be revised and equipped with a more differentiated approach, appreciating the singular nature of its international partners. In our view, the HR was right in singling out neighbourhood and strategic partners as her top priorities. None of the approaches outlined above should therefore be neglected in formulating a European Global Strategy.

<sup>21</sup> So called “Gymnich meetings” take place once during each Council presidency between the EU foreign ministers (Gymnich I) as well as following these meetings between the EU foreign ministers and the candidate countries (Gymnich II). The proposal to extend the format to a third meeting including the strategic partners dates back to the Polish presidency in 2011. Cf. <http://pl2011.eu/de/content/informelles-treffen-der-aussenminister-der-eu-mitgliedstaaten>, last accessed 24/9/2012.