

Taking stock of Europe's role in the world - After the year of crises 2014

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Although for European foreign policy the final legacy of 2014 as a year of crisis is still uncertain, we can reflect on the implications for the European Union's approach to its current security challenges.

Therefore on the 6th of March 2015 the Hertie School of Governance organised within the framework of the Dahrendorf Forum a panel discussion with two high-level diplomats, Sir Robert Cooper and Wolfgang Ischinger, on Europe's role in the world after the turbulent year of 2014.

This policy brief summarises the key themes of the debate and most relevant policy recommendations.

During the discussion, it quickly became obvious that the European Union has to deal with a growing number of uncertainties in various regions of the world.

Neither the ISIS conflict or the Russian-Ukrainian war were predicted by experts nor politicians but nevertheless mark the most significant security threats since the dissolution of the USSR.

Both of those crises show the weaknesses of the global collective decision making system and of nation states. The UN, G7 and G20 have proven inefficient/ineffective in reacting to emerging security threats, while individual nation states are losing credibility as their crisis responses fail to protect the security and prosperity of their citizens.

Moreover, both Cooper and Ischinger pointed out that there is also a crisis of the very nature of conflict. The traditional understanding of conflict prevention, and with it the rule of law, is presupposed on preventing a strong state from invading a weaker state. The conflicts of 2014 don't fit within this understanding.

Now the greatest security threat comes from weak states, not strong states. Conflicts have lost their 'state-to-state' character; thus making it increasingly difficult to define the sides in conflicts, with the use of modern technologies further blurring an already cloudy picture.

Although there was broad agreement within the European Union regarding the issuing of sanctions against Russia after the annexation of Crimea, the

EU hasn't managed to find a common approach towards the continuing crisis yet.

Therefore, there is a need for the EU to develop a comprehensive and effective strategy to deal with current and future crises as well as weak states in its neighbourhood and beyond.

Following the discussion event, we present the following policy recommendations to facilitate a coherent approach for EU foreign policy.

1. Introduce Qualified Majority Voting in the Foreign Affairs Council

Germany should be a leader in pursuing this change.

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2. Apply hybrid diplomacy

The hybrid nature of most of the crises the EU faces today calls for the application of complementary or 'hybrid' diplomacy.

The traditional diplomacy of foreign offices is clearly insufficient and has to be complemented with new forms of diplomacy. For example the promotion of entrepreneurial diplomacy, which involves sponsoring smaller and target-oriented projects.

Additionally, finding and promoting success stories will become increasingly important in information wars.

3. Enhance the European Union's delegations on the ground

The reduction of staff working in EU delegations in 'third countries' (outside the EU) was a mistake and has to be stopped.

Without a sufficient number of officials on the ground, the engagement with local society crucial for preventing crises is impossible. EU delegations bring together diplomatic staff from national embassies, non-governmental organisations and think-tank experts as well as facilitate contacts with local actors.

There is a great need to enhance the presence of the European Union in third countries in order to build up the capacity to support and cooperate with local governments and civil society organisations.

Strong diplomatic missions are especially crucial in times of crisis when lines of communication at governmental level may be disrupted.

4. Rethink the membership conditions for the EU

Discussions about the limits of the European Union seem to be unfruitful.

Instead, the EU should rethink the definition of potential candidates. One possibility would be to develop a test for membership suitability of a third country, similar to the test applied by NATO.

We suggest three basic questions to be addressed:

- (1) Does the candidate country unequivocally wish to be a member?
- (2) Do all EU member states want to admit the candidate country as a member state?
- (3) Do EU member states unanimously agree that the accession of the candidate country will enhance European security?

Only when all three questions are answered positively should the EU invite the candidate country to apply for ascension.

5. Strengthen the role of think tanks

Irrespective of the necessity and importance to focus on the day-to-day agenda, the European Union will benefit from grand ideas and visions for the future role of Europe in the world.

Since the development of strategic ideas is not a traditional strength of governments, think tanks are best placed to provide these ideas and visions.

For example, the topic of a common EU army was recently raised by the German defence minister, gaining attention in several member states. On this crucial strategic issue, think tanks could provide the comprehensive view and policy scenarios that the EU currently lacks.

Conclusion

To conclude, the discussion centres on an appeal to the European Union to, jointly with other actors, rethink its grand foreign policy strategy and therefore its position in the world. ■

For further information about the Dahrendorf Forum see www.dahrendorf-forum.eu

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