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Sven Biscop

**The International Security Engagement of the  
European Union – Courage and Capabilities for  
a “More Active” EU**

Report from the 1<sup>st</sup> European Strategic Forum, Warsaw 2006

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## The International Security Engagement of the European Union – Courage and Capabilities for a “More Active” EU

Introduction

### The European Strategic Forum – Constructing a Common Security Culture in Europe

The European Security Strategy of 2003 calls for an active, capable and coherent EU security policy and for a common ‘strategic culture’ in Europe. Since then much progress has been achieved, particularly with regard to the institutions and capabilities of European security policy. Yet the construction of a common security culture remains a critical challenge. Too often the EU is hampered by a lack of strategic consensus between Member States on where, how, when and for what reasons the EU should engage in security operations.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation, one of the leading political foundations in Europe, has long been at the forefront of progressive debate in European foreign and security policy. Within its wide array of activities the Friedrich Ebert Foundation has created a new flagship event to promote a common strategic culture and innovative thinking in European security policy: the *European Strategic Forum*.

The European Strategic Forum is an exclusive high-level roundtable that brings together parliamentarians, government officials and experts from the Member States and the EU to discuss the future of European security policy. The objective of the Forum is to build a security policy network in which progressive voices from new and old Member States meet and examine security concepts and policies for Europe.

### The European Strategic Forum, Warsaw, 14 September 2006

On 14 September 2006, the first European Strategic Forum was held at Warsaw on ‘The International Security Engagement of the European Union – Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead’. The EU’s international security engagement is increasing rapidly, with new

missions reaching from the military operation in DR Congo to the monitoring mission in Aceh, Indonesia. However, the strategic and political purpose of European security policy remains rather vague. Though the European Security Strategy constituted an important step forward in framing a common approach to security, it offers, as some participants highlighted, more general principles than a real strategy for action. Furthermore, the political will in Europe to engage in security operations abroad seems to be rather on the decline as fears of military and political overstretch and doubts about mission success are growing. Therefore, strengthening the strategic and political focus in Europe’s security policy is both a key lesson learned and an important challenge ahead for the EU.

Exploring the cases of EU engagement in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sudan and Belarus the debate at Warsaw centred specifically on two themes: Partnership and Prevention. Working in partnership is a key component of the European approach to security, and an important means of advancing the EU concept of ‘effective multilateralism’. Yet choosing the right partners – on a local as well as the international level – remains a demanding task. Participants at Warsaw pointed out that in security policy, partnerships should be built for the long term. In operational practise, however, partners are often selected on the basis of short-term benefits, without taking into account the implications of these partnerships for the long-term process of stabilisation and peace building in the region.

Within the European approach to security, prevention is a clear priority. However, participants acknowledged that present EU structures, particularly the intergovernmental mode of decision-making in ESDP, is not conducive to the implementation of pro-active, preventive security policies. Besides, in political terms prevention is rather difficult to ‘sell’, as its success, the non-occurrence of crisis, often remains unappreciated in the political and public realm.

To move from reactive to pro-active security policies remains a key challenge for the EU. But only by forcefully pursuing this strategic shift will Europe be able to focus *and* strengthen its international security engagement. In the following text, Sven Biscop, participant in the European Strategic Forum and Senior Research Fellow at the Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, explores ways and means of meeting the challenge of a ‘more active’ EU.

*Stefanie Flechtner*

Sven Biscop \*

## Courage and Capabilities for a “More Active” EU

In 2003 the EU adopted the European Security Strategy, the first ever strategic document providing long-term guidance for the whole of EU foreign policy. The Strategy calls for the EU to be ‘*more active*’ in pursuing its strategic objectives, through a *holistic* approach utilising ‘the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities’. ‘Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reform, dealing with corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights’ should produce ‘a world of well-governed democratic states’. This overall method and objective can be described as ‘*effective multilateralism*’.

And active the EU has become. In late 2006, no less than 11 civilian and military crisis management operations are ongoing within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) across the globe, including the Balkans, Palestine, Sudan, DR Congo and Aceh. Together, these involve about 8,000 troops and 500 civilians. Many more troops from EU Member States, up to 80,000 in total, are deployed in other frameworks, notably in Lebanon, where the EU has taken the lead in providing troops for a reinforced UNIFIL; in NATO operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan; and, still, in Iraq. In terms of preventive diplomacy, the ‘EU-3’ (France, Germany and the UK) are leading negotiations on nuclear proliferation with Iran. The EU with its Member States is already a global security actor to be reckoned with, much more so than many people realize.

Yet this ‘activeness’ also raises a number of questions. Why is the EU active in these cases and not in others? Which criteria determine *when* and *where* the EU as such engages in crisis management, militarily and diplomatically? And must not the EU look *beyond* crisis management and become ‘more active’ in its day-to-day policies as well?

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## Global Crisis Management

The Strategy states unequivocally: ‘As a union of 25 states with over 450 million people producing a quarter of the world’s Gross National Product [...] the European Union is inevitably a global player’. Not only is it the duty of the EU, given its weight, to ‘share in the responsibility for global security and in building a better world’, but the view of the EU as just a regional actor ignores the dynamics of an interdependent globalized world, in which ultimately Europe can be secure only if the world is secure. Furthermore, for multilateralism to be effective, it must be enforceable: ‘We want international organisations, regimes and treaties to be effective in confronting threats to international peace and security, and must therefore be ready to act when their rules are broken’.

But if the EU is very active in crisis management and preventive diplomacy, and puts great emphasis on the central role of and need to support the UN Security Council, it does not always behave as a *global* actor.

*Where:* The Member States are certainly not averse to deploying their forces, but the large majority are deployed in the Balkans, in Europe’s backyard where the EU and its Member States logically assume responsibility, and in Afghanistan and Iraq, as a follow-up to the interventions – one rather more controversial than the other – initiated by the US and a number of EU Member States. The large contingent in Lebanon provides an enormous opportunity to increase the EU’s standing in the Middle East, if the diplomatic follow-up is assured. But it contrasts sharply with the 1,000 troops of EUFOR RDC reluctantly deployed in DR Congo, a country the size of Western Europe and with little or no infrastructure which it could not seriously hope to cover. In reality, therefore, in case of serious trouble EUFOR RDC would look more like a classic evacuation operation, ready to take out European citizens in case of trouble. The same reluctance applies to Darfur: only after the African Union took on the operation did the reluctance to intervene give way to intense EU–NATO competition to gain visibility through second-line support for the AU. Contributions to UN operations, Lebanon aside, are minimal: in mid-2006 the

EU-25 accounted for only about 2,750 out of over 63,000 ‘blue helmets’, just 4.4%.

*When:* Although most Member States do put their forces in harm’s way in national, NATO or coalition-of-the-willing operations, and although legally the Petersberg Tasks include operations at the high end of the spectrum of violence, politically the Member States are still extremely divided over the EU’s ambition in this field. As Member States remain divided, in crisis situations the EU level is more often than not out of the loop. Consequently, even though the EU has proven that it can mount high-risk operations if the political will is present, most EU-led operations are of lower intensity and often smaller in scale. The still very young ESDP needs a number of successes to legitimize itself, hence the tendency to select operations with a large chance of success. To some extent therefore the criticism is justified that the EU takes on important but mostly ‘easy’ operations, in the post-conflict phase, in response to the settlement of a conflict – a criticism which can of course be applied to the international community as a whole. One must thus question whether the Member States are willing to fully accept the implications of the strong EU diplomatic support for the principle of ‘responsibility to protect’ (R2P) that was endorsed at the UN Millennium+5 Summit in September 2005. R2P implies that if a state is unable or unwilling to protect its own population, or is itself the perpetrator of genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes or crimes against humanity, national sovereignty must give way to a responsibility to protect on the part of the international community. In such cases, the Security Council must mandate intervention, if necessary by military means, which by definition implies high-intensity operations.

In spite of the global ambitions expressed in the Strategy, Member States are thus reluctant to commit large numbers of troops to long-term, large-scale operations outside their immediate periphery or where no direct strategic interests are at stake – where ‘the risks are too high and the stakes are too low’. There is more willingness to implement more specific rapid reaction operations, of relatively smaller scale and limited duration, but for high-intensity operations Member States still habitually look to other frameworks than the EU. Proactive – military *and* diplomatic – intervention, in the early stages of a crisis, remains difficult to accomplish.

It must be taken into account that in spite of the large overall numbers of European armed forces – the EU-25 have over two million men and women in uniform – the percentage of deployable capabilities is actually rather limited. For the EU-25 it is estimated at just 10%. Many issues have to be addressed: the low cost-effectiveness of a plethora of small-scale capabilities, unnecessary intra-EU duplications, the presence of over 400,000 quasi non-deployable conscripts, capability gaps in terms of ‘enablers’ (strategic transport, command, control and communications), slow transformation from territorial defence to expeditionary warfare. In view of the need for rotation only one third of the available forces can be deployed at any one time, so the EU-25 can field 70–80,000 troops. This is what the EU-25 effectively are doing today, so a substantial increase in deployments is only possible in the medium to long term, in function of the ongoing transformation of European armed forces.

### Permanent Prevention

Global security depends on more than crisis management and preventive diplomacy. In line with the holistic approach of the Strategy, long-term permanent prevention policies seek to *avoid* conflict and crisis in the first place.

‘Effective multilateralism’ must in fact be read as a very *progressive* foreign policy agenda: ensuring that every individual on earth has access to the core ‘global public goods’:

- physical security or freedom from fear;
- economic prosperity or freedom from want;
- political participation (democracy, respect for human rights, the rule of law);
- social well-being (access to health care, education and a clean and hazard-free environment).

To these four ‘goods’, *everyone* is indeed entitled – hence they are ‘global’ or ‘universal’ – and it is the responsibility of the public authorities to make sure everyone effectively has access to them – hence they are ‘public’.

In this regard too the EU is very active, notably in its bilateral relations with third countries, via the method of ‘positive conditionality’. Through policy frameworks such as the European Neighbourhood Policy vis-à-vis its

neighbouring countries and the Cotonou Agreement vis-à-vis the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries, the EU is putting the holistic approach into practice. By linking them to market access and economic and financial support, the EU aims to stimulate economic, political and social reforms, as well as security cooperation, so as to address the root causes and durably change the environment that leads to extremism, crisis and conflict. When fully implemented, 'positive conditionality' thus is a very intrusive approach, aiming in effect to export the EU's own societal model, but based on persuasion rather than coercion.

But if 'positive conditionality' as a theory seems sound enough, practice often lags behind, certainly in countries that do not – immediately – qualify for EU membership. The carrots that would potentially be most effective in stimulating reform, such as opening up the European agricultural market or setting up a system for legal economic migration, are those that the EU is not willing to consider, in spite of imperative arguments suggesting that Europe actually needs such measures. At the same time, conditionality is seldom applied very strictly. The impression created is that the EU favours stability and economic – and energy – interests over reform, to the detriment of Europe's 'soft power'. Surprisingly perhaps, in the Mediterranean neighbours, for example, public opinion mostly views the EU as a status quo actor, working with current regimes rather than promoting fundamental change, whereas, perhaps even more surprisingly after the invasion of Iraq, the United States is seen as caring more sincerely about democracy and human rights.

This lack of EU soft power should not be underestimated. Rather than the benign, multilateralist actor which the EU considers itself – 'the one that did not invade Iraq' – in many Southern countries it is first and foremost seen as a very aggressive economic actor. For many countries, the negative economic consequences of dumping and protectionism – which often cancel out the positive effects of development aid – are far more important and threatening than the challenges of terrorism and proliferation that dominate the Western foreign policy agenda, and therefore determine the image of the EU far more. In the current difficult international climate, the EU model is urgently in need of enhancing its legitimacy.

### Conclusion: More Active – Less Divided

In the European Security Strategy, the EU has adopted a very progressive foreign policy concept. The emphasis on partnership and prevention through working jointly for enhanced access to the core 'global public goods' offers an alternative 'European way' in contrast to other, more unilateralist and military approaches. The Strategy thus offers both a sound concept and an ambitious agenda, which is still valid and therefore does not have to be updated. But the EU must indeed become *more active* in fully and sincerely implementing it. This requires both more political courage and more, as well as better capabilities.

1. There are, sadly, too many conflicts and crises for the EU to deal effectively with all of them, certainly in a leading role. Prioritisation is therefore inevitable. Two sets of criteria seem to determine when and where the EU must lead, or make a substantial contribution to, diplomatic and military intervention, up to and including the use of force, if necessary and mandated by the Security Council. The intervention must be *proactive* – the EU should be a true *peacemaker*. On the one hand, if anywhere in the world the threshold for activating the R2P mechanism is reached, the EU, in view of its support for the principle, should muster the *courage* to contribute to its implementation. On the other hand, the EU must also contribute to the resolution of conflicts and crises that are of real strategic importance for Europe or, as the EU is a global actor, for the world. This would certainly include the Balkans, the Middle East and the Gulf, but a debate seems in order to further clarify these strategic interests. What would Europe's role be in case of conflict in North Korea, or in the Caucasus, or if vital energy supplies were cut off?
2. At the same time, the collective security system of the UN, and therefore the EU itself, as its main supporter and with two permanent members of the Security Council in its ranks, can be legitimate only if it addresses the threats to *everyone's* security. Too much selectivity undermines the system. Although it cannot always play a leading role, the EU must shoulder a significant share of the responsibility for global peace and security by playing an active role in the Security Council *and* by contributing capabilities to UN crisis management and peacekeeping operations, either as UN-led blue helmets or on 'sub-contracted' EU-led missions. If automaticity of availability of troops is difficult, a political decision

- could be made on the order of magnitude of a reasonable European contribution, in function of which the EU can then act as a ‘clearing house’ for Member States’ contributions. If the commitment in Lebanon is a positive example, the current contribution of less than 3,000 blue helmets for the rest of the world, and two Battlegroups on stand-by for operations primarily – but not exclusively – at the request of the UN, means that the EU is punching below its weight.
3. All of these commitments require *deployable* military capabilities that the EU is currently lacking. EU Member States should abandon the national focus that still drives them to strive after full capacity at the national level. Rather than at the level of each individual Member State, the EU-25 together must become capable. In fact, a wider political decision is in order, translating the European Security Strategy into a military level of ambition based on the full military potential of all Member States: how many forces should the EU-25 be able to muster for crisis management, as well as for long-term peacekeeping; what reserves does this require; and what capacity must be maintained for territorial defence? Within that framework, *pooling*, by reducing intra-European duplications, can produce much more deployable capabilities within the current combined defence budget.
  4. The EU must also muster the *courage* to effectively apply conditionality. Admittedly, ‘positive conditionality’ requires an extremely difficult balancing act, especially vis-à-vis countries with authoritarian regimes and great powers like Russia and China: maintaining partnership and being sufficiently critical at the same time. But in that difficult context, the EU should show more consistency and resolve in reacting to human rights abuses, which should visibly impact on the relationship with any regime. A much enhanced image and increased legitimacy will follow, notably in the eyes of public opinion, which is a prerequisite for the gradual pursuit of further-reaching political, economic and social reforms. But has the EU really solved the dilemma of stability versus democracy? A debate also seems in order on desired end-states, especially of the Neighbourhood Policy. Is our aim incremental progress while maintaining existing regimes, or full democratization – and if the latter, are our instruments sufficient to achieve that goal?
  5. More generally, the progressive agenda of the European Security Strategy risks losing credibility if the EU does not draw the full conclusions from it, notably for its international trade policies. If an exclusive focus on hard security undermines the effectiveness and legitimacy of a policy, so does a one-dimensional focus on trade, without a link to the political and social (including ecological) dimensions. Rethinking trade and agricultural policies – and migration policy – again demands leaders with enough political courage to further the EU project against certain established interests.
  6. Implementing the holistic approach requires the active cooperation of all global powers. The UN collective security system can work only if all permanent members actively subscribe to it and refrain from paralysing or bypassing the Security Council. Conditionality can work only if it is not undermined by actors that disregard human rights and other considerations in their international relations. Another debate therefore concerns how the EU can persuade strategic partners like Russia and China, and the US, that ‘effective multilateralism’ – as understood by the EU – is in their long-term interest.
  7. This holistic approach cannot be efficiently implemented without changes in the EU machinery. An EU Foreign Minister and European External Action Service would allow integration of the security, political, social and economic dimensions in all foreign policies, from the creation to the implementation and evaluation of policy. An EU Foreign Minister with a stronger mandate would also strengthen the EU’s capacity for preventive diplomacy.
  8. Finally, the European Security Strategy can only move from a concept to consistent and resolute action if the EU acts as one. As long as the EU remains divided between ‘Atlanticists’ and ‘Europeanists’, neither the EU nor NATO can be effective actors. Only a united EU has the weight to deal with the challenges of the globalized world and become a consistent and decisive actor, in an equal partnership with the United States.



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## **The International Security Engagement of the European Union – Courage and Capabilities for a “More Active” EU**

In 2003, the EU adopted the European Security Strategy, the first ever strategic document providing long-term guidance for the whole of EU foreign policy. The Strategy calls for the EU to be ‘more active’ in pursuing its strategic objectives, through a holistic approach utilising ‘the full spectrum of instruments for crisis management and conflict prevention, including political, diplomatic, military and civilian, trade and development activities’.

And active the EU has become. In late 2006, no less than 11 civilian and military crisis management operations were ongoing within the framework of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) across the globe. Yet this ‘activeness’ also raises a number of questions. Why is the EU active in these cases and not in others? Which criteria determine when and where the EU as such engages in crisis management, militarily and diplomatically? And must not the EU look beyond crisis management and become ‘more active’ in its day-to-day policies as well?

These questions were at the center of debate at the first European Strategic Forum of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in Warsaw, 2006. The Forum is a new security policy network in which progressive voices from new and old Member States meet and examine security concepts and policies for Europe. In its report, Sven Biscop, participant in the European Strategic Forum, addresses these questions and explores ways and means of meeting the challenge of a ‘more active’ EU.