

THE EUROPEAN GLOBAL STRATEGY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Many recent comments on the EU's Mediterranean policy come to the conclusion that the challenge raised by the Arab Spring has less to do with existing policies than with a lack of strategy. Both in the southern neighbourhood and in general, all parameters underlying the Mediterranean policy have changed dramatically. There were shortcomings in EU policies towards the region even after the 2011 update, but the core issue now is that the EU's entire Mediterranean vision seems obsolete and inadequate. While the Mediterranean and neighbourhood policies were convincingly explained and pinpointed by the European Security Strategy (ESS) in 2003, that document looks quite insufficient today. True, this does not regard the Mediterranean alone: the long period of policy renationalization and the endless economic and financial crisis initiated in 2008 have significantly weakened the EU, and in particular its broad ability and potential to act as an international actor.

In this framework, the Swedish government took the initiative in 2012 along with three other EU member states, Italy, Poland and Spain, to devise a new strategy. The four governments entrusted four think tanks with producing a report suggesting a fresh European Global Strategy (EGS), also involving other European think tanks. The EGS report, "Towards A European Global Strategy. Securing European Influence in a Changing World", edited by the Italian Institute of International Affairs (IAI), the Polish Institute of International Affairs (PISM), the Real Elcano Instituto, and the Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI) was published on May 28, 2013 (<http://www.europeanglobalstrategy.eu/nyheter/publications>). This article, comparing the 2003 ESS and the 2013 EGS, comments on various features of the EGS with regard to the Mediterranean and the southern neighbourhood.

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The Arab Spring shed vivid light on Europe's political impotence and weakness: while the sweeping changes underway would have required prompt strategic responses, neither the EU nor its members have proven able to provide a convincing and coherent response. The ambiguous decision taken by the May 27 Council of the European Union on whether or not to arm the Syrian opposition reflects the deep crisis in which the EU and its members are embedded very well. It also reveals to what extent the Europeans have been able to enjoy the comfortable security umbrella the United States is now shutting off - not only in the Middle East but also in the Mediterranean. In this framework, most Europeans are beginning to believe that the EU, as a civilian power, cannot cope with current developments and look with sympathy at British and French efforts to provide the otherwise missing "European" response. In fact, the role France and the UK are trying to play is similar to the one they played until the 1956 Suez crisis and brings to mind the same dangers and illusions. Rather than looking to France or the UK (or an American change of mind) to save themselves, the Europeans should be quickly reinforcing their Union and making it the "strong" civilian power it was about to become only ten years ago.

The EGS project comes from European quarters that want an EU civilian power to exist and want it to be strong. In this perspective, the EGS is on the same track initiated by the ESS, even though the latter was an official document and the former is merely a think tank policy brief. However, while the ESS was the document of an optimistic and confident civilian power, ready to implement a widely shared political agenda, the EGS reflects current difficulties and the less confident European mood. It suggests a way to achieve a shared agenda, whereas the ESS provided an agenda for action in an EU in which action was sought and willingly accepted by the EU members.

At a time of dwindling convictions, the EGS document makes two important points. The first one, in keeping with what has just been said, is that when it

comes to taking decisions on security, it is not true that such decisions, to be effective, need to be made either by old nation states or a full-fledged European federation. Decisions can well be taken by a strong civilian power, if member states strengthen it by means of adequate sovereignty transfers. The second important point made by the EGS document is that the High Representative institution as it was established by the Lisbon Treaty reform and as it is today needs to be modified. The EGS document suggests “boost[ing] the European External Action Service’s (EEAS) coordination capacity particularly vis-à-vis the policies under the purview of the European Commission” and, more in general, enhancing “political coordination”, including actions by the member states. As illustrated by developments in the two years since the Arab Spring, there is no doubt that the High Representative needs broader command on and stronger coordination powers of available EU tools. However, this author would like to add that the High Representatives also needs more autonomy, at least with respect to the fields in which states are willing to transfer sovereignty. In various circumstances during recent developments in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the EEAS’ leadership has appeared exceedingly dependent on the member states’ opinions that rarely converged and were thus unable to provide direction. The High Representative needs an even deeper reform than the one suggested in the EGS project.

While relating to all the EU’s strategic actions, the EGS is of particular relevance for Mediterranean policy. With regard to this issue, it raises two important points regarding the key concepts of neighbourhood and multilateralism.

Already very central in the ESS analysis, the neighbourhood is even more so in the EGS. The latter mentions “A neighbourhood of democracy, human rights and the rule of law” as one of the long-term, vital interests that can be derived from the EU’s values and aims. In the EGS, the lesson learned is that, contrary to the

ESS's experience, the neighbourhood "should not be perceived as a ring or buffer around the EU" (that is the ESS's "ring of well governed countries" destined to protect EU security). The ESS's concept of neighbourhood was part and parcel of the EU's post-Cold War security vision based on the perspective of democratic transformation in the neighbourhood by means of different layers of inclusion: enlargement and neighbourhood. The EU saw this transformation as the creation of a kind of co-prosperity zone, based on differentiated institutional-political ties, with the EU at its centre.

This project has been far from successful and the Arab Spring has clearly put an end to it by giving way to Islamist regimes that prioritize their autonomy over ties with the EU. In this sense, the EGS report is right in saying that neighbours need to be regarded as "potential partners" in the framework of differentiated policy and security dialogues or even strategic partnerships. While the neighbourhood policy (like its predecessors) was conceived as a shared policy framework southern partners had to stick to, any possible successor needs to limit itself to seeing the area as one of EU preferential strategic attention.

Furthermore, the EGS underscores very clearly that a southern neighbourhood limited to the Mediterranean area does not make much sense from a strategic point of view, given the ties between the Mediterranean, the Gulf, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and Central Asia so effectively highlighted by Arab Spring developments. In the past, the EU had hinted at an "east of Jordan" policy. On the other hand, many analysts have talked about the need to link, at a minimum, the Mediterranean and the Gulf almost since the launching of the ENP in 2003-04. While the cogency of the bureaucratic logic in Brussels and the political decline of the EU still tend to prevail, a change is mandatory today. Finally, the EGS exhorts the EU to take "comprehensive security responsibility" for its enlarged strategic neighbourhood across the Mediterranean and, in order to do that, to drop any hesitation to "undertake autonomously the full spectrum of civilian and military missions". This point will be aptly dealt with by the December

2013 European Council. An increase in the effectiveness of the CSDP would be very helpful. However, EU governments would do better not to overlook that, in order to be more effective, EU military missions need to be embedded in a broader strategy that is presently missing. The priority is in the overall strategic perspective.

The EGS's second relevant point from the angle of Mediterranean and southern neighbourhood affairs is the shift in emphasis from the role multilateralism was given in the ESS to the role of multipolarity. The EGS takes note of the fact that the multilateral organisation meant to govern the process of globalisation and its regional dimensions has somehow been superseded by a pattern of multipolar relations, which tend to replace competition among poles with universal (perhaps utopian) cooperation at the global level. In reality, the two trends coexist and, while the EGS recognizes that the "United Nations is and should remain at the core" of the global system, it warns the EU of the need to compete with emerging poles and, in that perspective, to choose a set of preferential partners (which it identifies as Turkey, the US, the Russian Federation and China). This is quite different from the ESS, in which "effective multilateralism" was considered key in giving the EU a global role and ensuring returns from it.

The increased political autonomy of many southern partners as a consequence of the Arab Spring forces the EU to look at them as poles. This marks the end of the multilateral dimension the EU unsuccessfully tried to give to its relations with southern neighbours and opens the way for different policies. Multilateralism, as suggested by the EGS, should be functional and should bring the EU and southern partners together with regard to specific functional aims (such as energy, transport, fisheries, and so on) rather than in a comprehensive political perspective. Furthermore, the EU should facilitate and support horizontal economic cooperation and integration among southern partners, without abandoning its agenda of vertical integration, but making sure the latter does not hinder the former.

In conclusion, EGS is a timely and essential contribution to the current debate on the EU. It is potentially a flag project for those EU governments that may want to initiate an action to get the European ship afloat again. Reinforcing the EU as a civilian power by providing it with a sensible strategic initiative is the right path to follow if the ship is to be set sailing again. If a shared European strategic perspective fails to emerge and be implemented, not only will the EU continue to weaken and deteriorate, but its very fabric will be threatened by national initiatives, as is already happening with France's and UK's initiatives towards the Mediterranean and other southern neighbourhood areas.

In this sense, the emphasis the EGS put on the southern neighbourhood is crucial. If we want the efforts deployed by the EU towards this area to be effective, the ENP needs to be framed in a new strategic perspective. An enlarged strategic southern neighbourhood, in which the EU takes comprehensive security responsibility by means of "proactive", "realistic" and "adaptive" partnerships with individual countries, is what the EGS aptly suggests and what urgently needs to be implemented.

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