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# The (Small) State of the Union: Assessing the EU's Ability to Implement Its Global Strategy

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**Abstract:** The European Global Strategy (EUGS) is a significant document that came out at a critical time. Decision makers and scholars need to identify and assess the challenges the EU is facing in its effort to pursue its new Strategy. This paper addresses the lack of a tool for identifying those challenges and assessing the EU's ability to respond to them by introducing a new analytical framework based on the conceptualization of the EU as a small power in the international system, and the literature about the international relations of small states. The framework combines the factors that impact upon a small state's behaviour and performance in the international system and consists of the following elements: a) the EU's relations with the great powers in the system, b) developments in the EU's neighbourhood, c) the EU's politics, and d) the EU's reputation. After discussing each one of them, the paper contributes a comprehensive assessment of the EU's ability to implement its Strategy. It concludes that in order to implement its Strategy, the EU should respond to specific challenges. Therefore, the framework this paper introduces can improve our understanding of both the EUGS and the Union's strengths and weaknesses, shed some light on what measures should be taken for the Union to respond to challenges that lie ahead and be used as a yardstick to assess the Union's progress. Moreover, the framework can be applied to other areas of the EU's external action and contribute to both drafting better informed strategic documents and supporting their implementation.

**Keywords:** EU Global Strategy; Small Power; Small States; EU Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP)

## **INTRODUCTION: MAPPING OUT A STRATEGY IS NOT ENOUGH**

This article evaluates the potential of the EU to implement its 'Global Strategy' (EUGS) against the state of the Union. The EUGS aspires to reinvigorate the EU's strategic thinking and action and to reshape the Union's role in the international system according to Juncker's Commission priorities. The strategy came out at a critical time – just a few days after the Brexit referendum and amid continuing concerns

over the EU's struggles to negotiate and navigate the threats and challenges of the twenty-first century. The EU is seen by several scholars as being "a long way outside its comfort zone", as Michael Smith (2013: 671) put it; or a "global actor past its peak", according to Charlotte Bretherton and John Vogler (2013), who, along with others (e.g. Webber, 2015), suggest that the Union exerts an ever-decreasing influence on the international system. It is against this background that the EU's High Representative and Vice President (HRVP) Federica Mogherini declared that "this is no time for uncertainty: our Union needs a Strategy. [...] a shared vision, and common action" (2016: 3). Indeed, public strategies can be of significant value and can serve multiple purposes, according to Alyson Bailes (2009: 4):

Internally, that is within a nation or vis-à-vis the members of an institution adopting a collective strategy, they can be designed to create confidence in leadership and/or unity around a new policy consensus; and to promote coordination of actions serving the strategy's purposes in perhaps widely varying fields and jurisdictions. Towards the outside world they offer transparency, signals of determination, and possibly more specific promises, inspirations or warnings.

Thus, the EUGS can be read as a narrative about the EU's self-image in the world, about its perception of threats and its vision of itself as a security actor, as well as an attempt to persuade and possibly inspire EU citizens by emphasizing the Union's value (Mälksoo, 2016). It is underpinned by its goal to enhance the Union's capabilities and confidence and a tone of determination, which is revealed primarily in its ambition for strategic autonomy. The EUGS emphasizes both old and new threats and underlines that in order to become stronger and address the challenges ahead the EU should remain united and capitalize on its multiple activities and "unparalleled networks" (p. 10), bringing together security, defence, development, trade, enlargement, and neighbourhood policies. Its scope is ambitious and promising; it is a global strategy in terms of both the wide array of means that are to be used for its implementation and the areas that are to be covered by it.

However, mapping out a strategy is not enough; the Union has to ensure that its goals and commitments will not remain only on paper. The EU's ability to implement the strategy and the challenges that the Union faces in its effort to do so should also be discussed. Although the content of the EUGS has already received much scholarly attention, both before (Barrinha, 2016; Biscop, 2016a; Drent and Zandee, 2016; Selchow, 2016) and after its publication (Biscop, 2016b; 2016c; Howorth, 2016; Juncos, 2016; Mälksoo, 2016; Smith, 2016; Tocci, 2016; Wagner and Anholt, 2016), most of the studies on the EUGS after its publication focus only on aspects of the strategy, e.g., the internal purpose of the EUGS (Mälksoo, 2016), the concept of resilience (Wagner and Anholt, 2016), and the relationship between the EUGS and the EU's Neighbourhood

Policy (ENP) (Smith, 2016). The literature on the EUGS lacks a comprehensive evaluation of the EU's ability to implement its Global Strategy. Yet, both decision makers and scholars need to identify and assess the EU's strengths and weaknesses, and the challenges the EU is going to face in its effort to pursue its new Strategy.

To fill that void this article introduces an analytical framework for assessing the EUGS against the state of the Union. It builds upon Asle Toje's (2008a; 2010; 2011) previous work on the EU as a "small power" and the literature about the international relations of small states, and expands on Toje's work by adding the factors that impact upon a small state's behaviour and performance in the international system. The framework consists of the following elements: a) the EU's relations with the great powers in the system, b) developments in the EU's neighbourhood, c) the EU's politics, and d) the EU's reputation. I argue that these factors impact upon the EU's capacity to implement the EUGS, and therefore are critical to its success or failure. The article relies on the EUGS document to investigate whether, in what ways and how satisfactorily the strategy deals with each of the framework's elements, which are then analysed with regard to the current 'state of the Union'. In addition to the EUGS document, I also consider the two annual EUGS implementation reports that have been issued in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

Thus, this article contributes to the debate on the EUGS by providing a comprehensive assessment of the strategy against the current state of the Union as well as by offering a framework that can also be used for future analyses. The article also serves as an accessible policy paper on the EUGS, and indeed it seeks to influence the debate beyond as well as within academia. It brings an International Relations perspective and, specifically, a neoclassical realist approach into the discussion of the EUGS that can improve our understanding of both the EUGS and the Union's strengths and weaknesses, and shed some light on what measures should be taken for the Union to respond to the related challenges that lie ahead. While this paper introduces a framework that can be used as a yardstick to assess the Union's efforts to implement the EUGS, this framework can also be applied to other areas of the EU's external action and contribute to the drafting of better strategic documents as well as to supporting their implementation. In addition, the article rekindles interest in the EU as a small power in the international system by enriching Toje's (2008a; 2010; 2011) work with a framework consisting of the factors that impact upon small states' behaviour, success and/or failure.

The article proceeds by first looking at the EU as an actor in the international system from an International Relations perspective, in which I also explain the rationale for taking a small power and neoclassical realist approach to developing a framework for assessing the EUGS. I then assess the EUGS against this new framework. The findings are important although hardly encouraging if the EU is to indeed implement its Global Strategy, which is a position that underpins this article.

Suggesting that the EU should identify the challenges and assess the obstacles that lie ahead in order to overcome them, this paper is underpinned by a normative perspective that is rooted in a series of premises. First, if back in 2003 the *European Security Strategy* was a ‘nice to have’ initiative, as it could accompany and provide a vision for the then newly established European Security and Defence Policy and the EU’s nascent aspirations to global actorness, in 2016 an updated version of this strategy was imperative. Currently the EU and its member-states are facing almost every single major asymmetrical threat that exists in the international system; the EUGS notes that “today terrorism, hybrid threats, economic volatility, climate change and energy insecurity endanger our people and territory” (p. 9). It has long been established that such threats do not respect borders, and so relying on purely national responses to them remains inadequate (Mogherini, 2016; European Commission, 2016b). Second, despite the fact that the prevailing image of the EU is one of a fragmented union, and the optimism for the EU project has decreased dramatically in comparison with the previous decade, public support for the Common Defence and Security Policy, the Common Foreign Policy, the Common Energy Policy and even a ‘European Army’ remains high and stable across almost the whole of the Union (European Commission, 2015b). Furthermore, the EU acts within a changing international system where the competition among established and rising powers is becoming more intense, and given the related uncertainty over the ‘Liberal International Order’, the Union has to redefine its position as an international actor (e.g. Tocci, 2018). The Global Strategy, if effectively implemented, could therefore help the Union both to uphold its values and restore its status in the world, and to appeal to its old and new partners and also to its citizens, for whose security and prosperity the strategy has ostensibly been drafted. In introducing a framework for the analysis of the EU’s state and identifying the challenges to the Strategy’s implementation, this article seeks to contribute to such an endeavour.

However, the normative character of this paper is balanced and indeed complemented by its problem-solving International Relations (IR) approach. In other words, its normative character is not compatible with a blind or vulgar euro-enthusiasm or EU-idealism. It recognizes the importance of power in the international system as well as the difficulties and limitations in the cooperation among the EU member-states in the areas of foreign policy and security, and the systemic and domestic factors that impact upon the implementation of the EUGS. As will be seen below, these factors include normative challenges to the EUGS and the EU more widely.

### **AN IR FRAMEWORK FOR ASSESSING THE EU’S ACTORNESS AND ITS GLOBAL STRATEGY**

An assessment of the EU’s state and the EUGS’s potential to work has to be based on certain grounds concerning the EU’s actorness. A good number of analyses of

the EU as an actor in the areas of foreign policy and security raise a crucial question: what kind of power is the EU? There are plenty of suggestions, including: a “civilian power” (Duchene, 1973), a “normative power” (Manners, 2002), a “good citizen” of the international system (Dunne, 2008), a “quiet superpower” (Moravcsik, 2009), an “imperial power” (Sepos, 2013) and even a “neocolonial power” (Mikelis, 2016). For all their value, most of these conceptualizations advance the *sui generis* approach to the EU. Therefore, they cannot help us understand the EU’s place in the world and in relation to other actors, namely the states that the EU competes and/or cooperates with.

To address this predicament Toje (2008a) conceptualized the EU as a small power. He argues that “the small power concept is compelling because it takes into account the EU’s need -irrespective of its possible *sui generis* characteristics - to operate in a world order dominated by Westphalian states” (Toje, 2011: 44). Toje also contends that the EU, despite its ambitions and stated goals, has not managed to play the role of a great power in the domains of foreign policy and security (2011: 52). His aim is not to downgrade EU action, but to underline the existence of the EU’s established actorness, which in his view fits that of a small power.

Toje’s argument is convincing. Although the EU is not a state, it constitutes a power in the international system (Hill and Smith, 2005) and therefore we need a concept that enables us to think of the EU in terms of the state-centric system within which the EU acts. However, the Union as a whole is not small, taking into account its population or market size; even in terms of security and foreign policy the military capabilities of all the EU member-states together and their diplomatic and economic weight - mainly that of the bigger member-states - seem not to fit notions of smallness. Yet, when it comes to hard power and security, the EU appears to be less than the sum of its parts. Therefore, in the areas of security policy, the EU constitutes the weaker party in its relationships with the great powers in the system. What is more, it seems that it has lost even the transformative power it used to have (Grabbe, 2014; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2015).

Therefore, Toje is right when he argues that the EU will have to continue to respond to an international system it does not control (2010: 186) - and in a sense, impacting upon the system is what distinguishes great powers from small powers (Keohane, 1969). In addition, greatness or smallness is also about recognition, and the EU is not recognized by major and minor players in the system as a consequential power in the areas of security and defence (Chaban and Elgström, 2014). Thus, in line with Toje (2008a; 2010; 2011) this paper suggests that the EU constitutes a small power in the areas of security and defence.

However, the small power concept is hardly an unproblematic one. International Relations scholars have found it hard to agree on a single definition of it, and most

of the time the concepts of a small state and a small power are used interchangeably; yet even when they adopt different definitions, small state scholars usually investigate a certain group of states and/or they arrive at similar conclusions about their behaviour (Pedi, 2016). Therefore, what is important is to distinguish smallness from greatness. Toje (2008a; 2011) follows a mixed approach. He endorses Robert Keohane's (1969) view that a small power is a state that cannot influence the international system alone, but can impact upon it in cooperation with others. In addition, he adopts the behavioural approach, accepting that small powers share specific behavioural characteristics. Thus, following the relevant literature Toje suggests that the traits that distinguish small powers from great powers, are: that they are dependent on others for their security; that they prioritize and focus on their vicinity; that they support international institutions and international law; and finally, that they are "defensive by nature" (2011: 47-48).

According to this rationale, the EU can be conceptualized as a small power because it is dependent on the US for significant aspects of its security, it advances multilateralism, respect for the UN and the wider rules-based international order, and it suffers from a lack of capabilities, which, however, does not reflect the capabilities its member-states possess, but their unwillingness to increase the EU's military capabilities by adding up and merging their resources. Moreover, Toje (2008a) argues that the EU's small power identity is reflected in the types of external security missions that the EU has undertaken. He adds that it is not surprising that the EU acts as a small power, because it consists primarily of small member-states and, furthermore, Germany with its aversion to hard power – and indeed to assuming anything like a great power status (Miskimmon, 2012) – plays a leading role within the Union.

I argue that the Union's small power identity is also reflected in the EUGS. The focus there is on the EU's vicinity, on "states and societies in and around Europe" (Mogherini, 2016: 4); adherence to multilateralism is also central to the EUGS, which is in line with the EU's devotion to the UN principles and the rules-based order that underpins the strategy (e.g. p. 8). Respect for international law is what the strategy evokes with regard to the Union's relations with Russia and China, for example. The EU's ability to exert soft power is also emphasized: "[T]he European Union has always prided itself on its soft power – and it will keep doing so, because we are the best in this field" (Mogherini, 2016: 4). The EUGS also expresses the Union's ambition to increase its use of hard power in order to enhance its credibility (p. 44). In its introduction Mogherini stresses that (2016: 4)

the idea that Europe is an exclusively 'civilian power' does not do justice to an evolving reality. For instance, the European Union currently deploys seventeen military and civilian operations, with thousands of men and women serving

under the European flag for peace and security – our own security, and our partners’. For Europe, soft and hard power go hand in hand.

Yet, thus far, the majority of EU operations have been of a predominantly civilian rather than military nature. In addition, the fact that most of the EU member-states that are also NATO members do not reject the use of hard power in the NATO context or in ad hoc coalitions, but see the EU as a different kind of actor, namely as “a force for good”, or a “normative power” which uses its soft power to change the world (Fiott, 2015), corroborates the argument that the EU’s strategic action is underpinned by a small power mindset.

However, it remains a legitimate question whether smallness is compatible with the EU’s aspiration for global actorness, which is a central aspect of the EUGS. Smallness should not be mistaken for impotence (Browning, 2006). Indeed, what made several IR scholars turn their attention to small states was the ability of the latter to pursue their goals *despite* their seemingly limited capabilities (i.e. Fox, 1959; Keohane, 1971; Katzenstein, 1985; Grøn and Wivel, 2011). In many respects, smallness is what small powers make of it, and sometimes playing the card of smallness can be rewarding (Browning, 2006; Schmidl, 2001). Denmark, Norway and other small powers have acted at a global level several times, yet their global actorness has been issue specific and of a different type than that of great powers (Wivel, 2013; Neumann and De Carvalho, 2015). Small states advance their interests and manage to make a difference in the international system by playing specific roles, usually by acting as norm entrepreneurs, mediators, honest brokers, experts or donors (Ingebritsen, 2002; Goetschel, 2011).

These roles fit the EU like a glove. Acting as a small power is what the EU knows well, and most importantly it is what has enabled the EU to make a difference in the world and play a distinct and much needed role. If we look at the Iran Deal we can get a clear understanding of what greatness and smallness mean in international relations, as well as of the EU’s role as a global actor in the international system. The three big EU member-states, Germany, France, and the UK, were taking part in the negotiations independently and were joined by the great powers in the system, the US, China and Russia. The five permanent members in the United Nations Security Council and Germany could proceed alone with the deal, yet the EU acted as a facilitator and honest broker; it brought legitimacy and its power of attraction to the process and the agreement. It is now, after the US withdrawal, acting as a guarantor of this deal.

Toje’s aim is to conceptualize the EU’s actorness and contribute to the debate on what kind of power the EU is. His intellectual endeavour ends at the point where he proves that the EU’s mindset and actions match those of a small power. Yet, the value of the EU’s conceptualization as a small power increases if we expand our

analysis to include small state resources and strategies. Such a perspective will allow us to assess the ‘state’ of the Union and its potential as a small power in the system. Small states that manage to ‘punch above their weight’ harness specific resources at the systemic, state, and individual levels and follow a certain strategy, using what has been called a “small but smart state” strategy (Arter, 2000; Grøn and Wivel, 2011). Thus, for the EU to succeed in implementing its strategy, it has to hold and exploit the resources that enable small powers to achieve their goals.

Although the literature on small powers is fragmented and scattered, and no consensus exists among scholars on the definition of a small state, there is much common ground among them concerning the factors that impact upon a small power’s behaviour and enable it to accomplish its goals (Pedi, 2016). Small state scholars, with a few exceptions (e.g., Maass, 2014), generally agree that these resources belong to all three levels of analysis – the systemic, the state and the individual level. First and foremost come systemic parameters (Maass, 2014), and then properties seen to reside at the state or domestic level such as geography (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2005), unity (Katzenstein, 1985), identity-reputation (Ingebritsen, 2002), political arrangements (Baillie, 1998; Doeser, 2011; Thorhallsson and Kirby, 2012), administration (Thorhallsson, 2012), history (Reiter, 1994), economy (Handel, 1985) and, last but not least, leadership (Kouskouvelis, 2015).

Although these factors are important to great powers too, they affect small powers and great powers in different ways; for example, small states generally have fewer resources, are more vulnerable, cannot influence the international system by themselves, or count more on their unity and/or good reputation so as to ‘punch above their weight’. Thus, I expand and complement Toje’s analysis of the EU as a small power by contributing a framework for analysis consisting of a combination of the factors that impact upon a small power’s behaviour and performance in the international system. I combine the different factors into four categories and investigate the EUGS’s potential against a) EU relations with the great powers in the system, b) developments in the EU’s neighbourhood, c) EU politics and d) the EU’s reputation.

My analysis is based on a neoclassical realist approach. Such a choice is compatible with Toje’s (2010) perspective and thus provides continuity in the argument. But most importantly I draw on neoclassical realism for two other reasons: first, it recognizes the preponderance of the international system but also the role that intervening variables can play in a state’s behaviour and performance; therefore it provides the intellectual springboard for an eclectic framework; second, neoclassical realists do not simply associate power with capabilities and/or outcomes, but they perceive power as influence maximization and acknowledge that at times even lesser powers in the system can provoke changes and ‘punch above their weight’ (Lobell et al., 2009; Toje and Kunz, 2012). Thus, for them smallness is not necessar-

ily a synonym of weakness or impotence. That an increasing number of small state scholars draw on neoclassical realism for their analysis (Contessi, 2015; Mouritzen and Wivel, 2005; Neumann & de Carvalho, 2015) gives strength to the view that neoclassical realism constitutes a helpful paradigm for researching the international relations of small states (Pedi, 2016).

## **FACTORS AFFECTING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUGS EU Relations with Great Powers**

Small states are unable to shape the international system and therefore they are particularly sensitive to changes and pressures at the systemic level as the latter usually enable both great challenges and opportunities (Maass, 2014). The interests of lesser powers are better served within a bipolar system where competition among the two great powers is high (Keohane, 1971); in contrast a unipolar or multipolar system provides fewer opportunities for manoeuvring and also poses the danger that small states' interests can be ignored. In this context, the state of the system and the relationship between the EU and the great power or powers in the system are crucial. After all, it was bipolarity and the US fear of communism that created the conditions for the European integration and provided the EU project with ample opportunity to thrive. Yet, the current international system, which leans towards multipolarity, seems unfavourable to the EU.

First, the US, on which Europeans are used to relying for certain important aspects of their protection, has directed its attention far from Europe. This has been the case in the Bush era with its focus on the Middle East, and also since the beginning of the Obama Administration with the 'pivot to Asia'. These policies signalled the need for Europeans to assume greater responsibility for their defence and security. During the 2016 NATO summit in Warsaw President Obama (2016) stated that "Europe will remain a cornerstone of America's engagement with the world." Yet, he underlined that "it is essential that NATO members continue to invest more in our common defence." The EUGS is consistent with this rationale, emphasizing that the US is a core partner in both security and trade (p. 37), but also stressing that a solid and healthy transatlantic relationship presupposes that the EU will become capable of taking autonomous action (p. 20).

The election of Donald Trump as US President has further complicated the EU's relations with the US. Developments like the US withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Deal, the cancellation of the Transatlantic Trade Investment Partnership, and Trump's ambivalence towards NATO, challenge the EUGS's claims about the strength of the EU-US partnership. The EU-US relationship is not what it was and the unity of the West is contested, and this is also recognized by other powers (Dykin et al., 2018). Furthermore, developments in the US relations with Russia and China as well as the US policy towards other states like Syria, Turkey, and

North Korea always impact upon the EU, yet they may not always be the subject of convergence.

With the rising uncertainty, the need for an autonomous EU in both defence and diplomacy has become more pressing (Biscop, 2016d). This change is well reflected in the EUGS annual reports and the June 2018 Council conclusions. The first EUGS annual report (EEAS, 2017: 9) notes that “the new US Administration is reshaping America’s role in the international arena.” The second annual report (EEAS, 2018a: 11) emphasizes the importance of the EU-US strategic partnership, referring to the areas on which the EU and the US have worked together, but also underlines that “at the same time, we have stood up for our values, principles and interests when we felt that they were challenged and we will continue to do so. This is particularly true when it comes to defending and promoting the rules-based international order that has been built together with the US in recent decades.” The European Council (2018: 8) takes an even clearer position on the US’s imposition of tariffs by endorsing the “rebalancing measures, potential safeguard measures to protect our own markets and the legal proceedings at the WTO, as decided on the initiative of the Commission.” The Council also reaffirms the EU’s decision to “respond to all actions of [a] clear protectionist nature, including those calling into question the Common Agricultural Policy” (ibid.). Therefore, though they were previously principal trading partners for each other and champions of free trade, it is possible that the EU and the US could enter a trade war. The EU’s ability to uphold its values and form new partnerships, i.e. with Canada, Japan and other countries, will be critical in this regard.

The evolving, yet somewhat negative US stance towards NATO and its European allies threatens the EU-US security partnership as well. Developments on the other side of the Atlantic in tandem with Russia’s assertive policies in the EU’s eastern and southern neighbourhood as well as the instability in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) provided the defence and security integration with a new impetus. Since the publication of the EUGS the EU has made considerable progress in these areas (EEAS, 2017; 2018). The formation of the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD), the European Defence Industrial Development Programme, the Commission’s European Defence Action Plan (EDAP), and the European Defence Fund (EDF) signifies the member-states’ willingness to build economies of scale and institutions to support them in the areas of security and defence. Like the EUR 13 billion with which the EDF is endowed to “finance collaborative research projects and co-fund capability development”, the HRVP’s proposal for a EUR 10.5 billion European Peace Facility to support the CSDP’s missions and operations, and the Parliament and Council’s agreement for a EUR 500 million European Defence Industrial Development Programme to “support competitiveness and [the] innovative capacity of the EU’s defence indus-

try" (EEAS, 2018a) reveal a determination from the EU's side to further proceed with security and defence integration this time.

Yet, the EU needs to clarify what it means by "strategic autonomy" and where it stands with regard to its relationship with NATO (Fiott, 2018). The EUGS document and the two annual reviews (EEAS, 2016; 2017; 2018) emphasize the importance of the EU-NATO partnership. However, many EU members and especially smaller member-states tend to emphasize the preponderance of NATO when it comes to security and defence matters (Fiott, 2015). They see the Union more as a civilian power and they are not prepared to further surrender their sovereignty, especially in the areas of defence and security. On the contrary, they are willing to work harder towards the diversification of their options rather than towards the EU's autonomy (Robinson, 2016). In practice, though, there is much more interoperability and complementarity than competition and duplication between NATO and the EU structures (Gebhard and Smith, 2015; Græger, 2016) and this is also the spirit that underpins the EUGS.

It seems that for the Europeans, pursuing strategic autonomy means enhancing their defence by investing in defence research and development projects, strengthening the European defence industry, avoiding duplications, reviewing their needs and capabilities and being able to act together. The EU's aim is to increase its effectiveness and credibility in the areas of security and defence and at the same time decrease costs and its dependence on the US for its security. In addition, development of the defence industry can bring economic benefits and will also support job creation. What matters, though, in terms of the EU-NATO relationship is that if the EU's member-states manage to enhance their capabilities, then NATO is also automatically strengthened.

Apart from the US, the EU also has to deal with Russia and China (among others) (Smith, 2013; Howorth, 2016). The EUGS recognizes that Russia constitutes a threat to the European security order and that there is a need for a united approach in regard to it (p. 33). Moreover, the EUGS makes clear that the EU will not accept deviations from international law and "will not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea." However, the strategy also acknowledges that the EU and Russia are interdependent and thus the Union appears willing to "engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when our interests overlap". While this is desirable, the EU-Russia relations are characterized by a series of misunderstandings (Howorth, 2016). Especially after the Ukraine crisis the EU-Russia relationship is seen by both sides through the lens of the 'security dilemma'; Russia does not hesitate to respond to what might be perceived as a provocation by using hard power (Nitoiu, 2016), whereas the effectiveness of the EU's soft power in the area is contested (Keukeleire and Delreux, 2015). In connection with this, during the Ukraine crisis, Europeans were reminded that actions regarding their Eastern borders should be examined

under the scope of power politics, an aspect of international politics that the EU tends to overlook (Biscop, 2015).

Furthermore, the competition between the EU and Russia opens windows of opportunity for local elites to exploit external support in order to perpetuate their staying in power, yet under conditions of corruption and inefficiency, as the case of Moldova shows (Nizhnikau, 2016). Also, the Russian involvement in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean is the clearest proof that President Putin wishes to restore Russia's role as a major player in world politics at any cost (Kouskouvelis, 2017; Litsas, 2017). In addition, Russia's disinformation campaigning against the EU, especially in Central and Eastern Europe (Pomerantsev and Weiss, 2014), and incidents like the case of the poisoning of a Russian double agent in London (the Skripal case), increase the suspicion between the two sides. Also, energy relations involving Russia remain a hard puzzle to solve for Europeans, and EU officers have to accommodate the different and often conflicting approaches of different member-states towards Russia. Slovakia's Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajcak's view concerning the continuation of the sanctions the EU has imposed against Russia is indicative: "I am not calling for abolishing the sanctions. But what I don't want to see is that we formally maintain the sanctions and behind the sanctions, everyone is signing big deals with Russia, visiting, meeting people who are blacklisted" (quoted in Emmot, 2016). Although member-states remain committed to the imposition of the sanctions, the sanctions' effectiveness has been contested; it has been argued that after initially suffering a shock because of them, Russia's economy has responded to the western sanctions effectively and manages to decrease their impact (Conolly, 2018). Two years after the publication of the EUGS the EU remains consistent in its approach towards Russia; however, the Europeans have not succeeded in influencing Russia's stance towards Ukraine, international law or multilateralism; yet they try to find some common ground with Russia in the cases of Syria and the Iran deal (EEAS, 2018a).

If Russia is an old enigma, China (in its new guise as a great power) is a newer conundrum for Europeans. Both countries constitute a threat to the European interests to the extent that they will try to challenge the established order, oppose European initiatives in support of a rule-based international system (Smith, 2013) and seek to create rifts among the member-states. Just a few days after the EUGS's publication, the EU's Commissioner for Trade, Cecilia Malmström, wondered out loud about a strange inconsistency during an official visit to China:

why can Chinese firms make high profile purchases in Europe, including airports in Germany, the Port of Piraeus in Greece and Italy's Pirelli tyres, not to mention Volvo cars in my own home town of Gothenburg when European investors face major barriers, including equity caps, forced technology transfer or

licensing restrictions in sectors like automotive, rail, construction and environmental services?

She further suggested that the Chinese should put in place more reforms and cooperate more closely with the EU (European Commission, 2016a). Against this background the EU's new Strategy (p. 36) states that

[t]he EU will engage China based on respect for rule of law, both domestically and internationally. We will pursue a coherent approach to China's connectivity drives westwards by maximizing the potential of the EU-China Connectivity Platform, and the ASEM and EU-ASEAN frameworks. The EU will deepen trade and investment with China, seeking a level playing field, intellectual property rights protection, greater cooperation on high-end technology, [and] dialogue on economic reform, human rights and climate action.

The Strategy does not provide any information on the procedures the Union will follow or the tools it possesses to effect changes in its relationship with China. Just days after the Strategy's publication, the European Commission issued a Joint Communication to the Parliament and the Council concerning the new EU strategy on China, which was later welcomed by the Council of the European Union. The Council's (2016) conclusions from 18 July 2016 recognize China's advanced status in the international system, note that the EU-China cooperation should be of mutual benefit for both actors, identify areas of mutual interest such as trade, investment, innovation research, connectivity, multilateralism and the region of the Asia-Pacific, and underline the EU's interests in human rights in China as well as in reforms in the Chinese economy. Nonetheless, the Council stresses that China's action should be rules-based and that all member-states and EU institutions will have a united and consistent approach towards China.

Two years on, the EU's position remains unchanged (EEAS, 2018a). At the same time the Chinese are expanding their economic activities to Europe, and member-states are competing for Chinese investments while supporting Chinese initiatives at diplomatic and economic levels in return (Emmott and Koutantou, 2017). It seems that this tactic has already worked in Europe and it is helping China secure some diplomatic victories; the efforts of EU member-states to tone down the language in resolutions against China, and even block them, as well as a series of high-level official visits by Xi Jinping to key European capitals, are indicative of China's rising status (Johnson, 2016). Moreover, China's economic activity and overall engagement in Africa are growing and threatening European interests on a continent where the EU has been the only major player, donor and investor for years (Biscop, 2016; Kouskouvelis, 2017; Smith, 2013).

The EUGS was drafted, in part, with the aim to protect the liberal order that the EU and the US have co-created. This order is now challenged not only by the 'usual suspects' China and Russia, but also by the US itself. As it is challenged by all of the three great powers in the system, the EU's success in implementing the EUGS depends on how it adapts to the new reality of the EU-US partnership. Furthermore, although the US, Russia and China challenge the liberal order, their interests do not coincide. The EU can pick its battles with each one of them individually and play the game of 'divide and rule' to serve its own interests.

### **The EU's Neighbourhood**

Geography has a particular importance for small states, as they usually have only limited resources at their disposal for responding to challenges stemming from their location; when you are small, who one's neighbours are matters more, but one's location in relation to the great power or powers of the system is also significant (Mouritzen and Wivel, 2005). Of course, the EU as a whole is, in geographic terms, 'greater' than the majority of its neighbours. However, in comparison with the great powers in the system, its position makes it much more vulnerable. Almost every major challenge existing in the international system today is growing at the EU's periphery. Thus, from the very beginning, in the process of the strategy's drafting, the HRVP emphasized the need for the strategy to focus on the EU's vicinity (Mogherini, 2015). The strategy refers to violent extremism, radicalization, terrorism, migration, and governmental, economic, societal, and climate/energy-related fragility (p. 9). The EUGS assumes that other countries in the region share the EU's perception of threats, and also that the EU's power of attraction is still enduring in these countries (p. 24). Therefore, the EU and the countries in its vicinity can cooperate in order to fight the shared perceived threats (pp. 9, 21). In this context, the EUGS priorities are a credible enlargement policy for the Western Balkans and Turkey, and fostering resilience in countries within and beyond the EU's Enlargement Policy and Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (pp. 21, 23-25).

Yet, it seems that the EU's ability to transform its neighbourhood has diminished (Grabbe, 2014; Keukeleire and Delreux, 2015). The situations in Turkey, the Western Balkans, the Middle East, and the North Africa area show that the ENP and the Enlargement Policy have not worked out there as effectively as in Central and Eastern Europe. There is no evidence that the ENP's review or the new plan for the Western Balkan states' accession to the EU will remedy this situation. The Western Balkans constitute a potential source of instability in the EU's vicinity (Bellou, 2016). Nevertheless, there have been voices suggesting that encouraging the enlargement process in the Western Balkans can potentially reinvigorate the European project at a critical moment (Joseph et. al., 2016). Indeed, the EU, in keeping with the spirit of the EUGS, has drafted a new plan setting 2025 as a horizon date for the Western

Balkans' accession to the EU under the condition that by then, the necessary reforms will have been completed and their disputes with neighbouring countries will be resolved (European Commission, 2018).

However, it takes two to tango and the circumstances in the area are not beneficial. The enlargement prospect is not as attractive or realistic as it used to be (Manchin, 2011). Either the EU currently lacks the sticks and carrots that helped transform the Central and Eastern European countries both right after the end of the Cold War and during the following more than two decades, or these tools are not appropriate for the Western Balkan states. Exploring the factors that shape the enlargement process in South-eastern Europe, Schwarz (2016: 768) finds that political transformation can work "only in conjunction with economic transformation and a sound reform policy or in conjunction with a sound reform policy, a low level of conflicts and high attention to enlargement." These preconditions hardly exist in the Western Balkans. The Council's (2018) *Conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process* note that in most of the Western Balkan cases progress is slow and modest. In addition, due to domestic considerations some member-states remain reluctant to fully support the enlargement prospect for the Western Balkans, and others suggest that deepening the EU's institutions should precede the Union's further widening.

At the same time, relations between Turkey and the EU have become strained, especially after the July 2016 coup and Turkey's authoritarian turn. Since then, purges and imprisonment of Turkish citizens have become a matter of routine. President Erdogan has verbally attacked European leaders and states several times and also has declared that he is prepared to even restore the death penalty as punishment for those who initiated the coup, making Turkey's distance from the EU and its values seem even greater. Meanwhile, the EU, by signing the EU-Turkey Statement, has used Turkey as a buffer state in the recent refugee crisis (Biscop, 2016a); in exchange Turkey would receive three plus three billion euros for hosting refugees. However, the moral base of the agreement as well as its effectiveness have been contested by European leaders and international organizations, as the deal seems to undermine the EU's core values concerning democracy and human rights (Gogou, 2017; Verhofstadt, 2016). In addition, the EU renders itself dependent on Turkey's will at a period when Turkey seeks to raise its status in the area and the world and maximize its gains at any cost, and follows a rather erratic foreign policy (Kouskouvelis, 2013). Neither of the two EUGS annual reports refer to Turkey. However, the *Conclusions on Enlargement and Stabilisation and Association Process* adopted by the Council of the European Union note, *inter alia*, Turkey's authoritarian turn, condemn its illegal actions in the Aegean Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean and underline that "Turkey has been moving further away from the European Union. Turkey's accession negotiations have therefore come to a standstill..." (Council of the European Union, 2018: 11–13).

Consistently with the EUGS, the EU has also worked towards enhancing resilience and promoting reforms according to the rule of law in areas to both the East and South of its territory (EEAS, 2017; 2018). The EU agreed on “20 deliverables for 2020” with the countries of the Eastern Partnership, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, in order to “achieve tangible results for the citizens of that region”, and it also took action in the southern neighbourhood, namely in Tunisia, Lebanon, Jordan, Somalia, and the Sahel (EEAS, 2017; 2018a: 10). It also worked on several fronts concerning Syria and Libya. Yet in both cases the magnitude and the complexity of the situation is such that it lies beyond the EU’s ability to bring about any change alone, while in the case of Syria it is clear that other powers, like Russia, Turkey and Iran, aspire to arrive at a resolution of the Syrian civil war on their own.

Migration seems to be the most pressing challenge stemming from the EU’s vicinity. Although the illegal border crossing has been significantly decreased (Council of the European Union, 2018), and the flows are considerably lower than they were in 2015, migration affects the EU and its member-states in multiple ways. First, there is a huge number of migrants in Europe that need to be integrated into European societies and states, so there is a demand for integration policies and funding. Second, although the migration flows are currently decreasing, given the environmental threats, civil wars and conflicts existing in the EU’s southern vicinity, migration will continue to constitute an attractive solution for the problems of people in Africa and the Middle East. Thus, the EU’s ability to foster resilience in states and societies in its southern neighbourhood will be critical. The Council (2018) has stressed that “tackling the migration problem at its core requires a partnership with Africa aiming at a substantial socio-economic transformation of the African continent building upon the principles and objectives as defined by the African countries in their Agenda 2063.” Yet, fostering socio-economic development in Africa is a long, open ended process, and in many respects it is beyond the EU’s control.

At the same time migration has become an increasingly politicized and divisive issue inside the EU and across the member-states, threatening the Union’s coherence, intensifying populism, nationalism and Euroscepticism and challenging one of the biggest EU achievements – the Schengen Area. The extent to which the EU will manage, on the one hand, to fight migration’s root causes, and, on the other, to persuade EU citizens – including through effective integration policies – that migration is a phenomenon with which the Europeans have to learn to live, will determine not only the EUGS’s success or failure, but also the EU’s very existence – at least the existence of the EU as we know it.

Hence, the developments in the Western Balkans, Turkey and MENA challenge the EUGS’s assumptions that the states in the EU’s neighbourhood share the EU’s interests and perceptions of threats as well as its belief in its enduring power of attraction. Although encouraging enlargement and promoting resilience are actions in the

right direction, the situation 'on the ground' inside and outside the EU shows that predicaments coming from its vicinity will continue to challenge the EUGS and the EU's existence, as we know it, as most of the issues stemming from the situation in the EU's periphery are deeply divisive. This does not mean that the EU should abandon its enlargement and resilience policies. On the contrary, it should continue them, but only with the precondition that it will create realistic prospects and also the realization that the EU is and will remain vulnerable to developments in its vicinity. Against this background the EU should also enhance its own resilience at both the state and society levels in order to respond to threats emanating from its neighbourhood.

## EU Politics

Political arrangements, and especially consensual politics, are important to successful small states (Baillie, 1998; Ingebritsen, 2002; Thorhallsson and Kirby, 2012). Political ideas matter because they shape perceptions and actions, whereas the roles of opposition and political unity are critical to small states (Doeser, 2011). Especially unity in terms of strategic cohesion across the political spectrum and among the people is a sine-qua-non for a small state's success (Fox, 1959; Vital, 1967; Katzenstein, 1985). Of course, in the context of the EU we have to deal with different societies, but also with a society of states and the various EU institutions. Therefore, for the purpose of our framework 'EU politics' refers to the ideas and values that dominate debates at both the EU and the member-states level, as well as the relations between member-states and those between member-states and EU institutions, and also to the level of cooperation and coordination between the different policies and polities.

Concerning the relations between the member-states and those of the member-states with the EU's institutions, the EUGS recognizes the significance of unity and refers to its importance several times (pp. 7, 8, 10, 44, 16–17, 46–47). In the document, it is noted, for example, that

[f]orging unity as Europeans – across institutions, states and peoples – has never been so vital nor so urgent. Never has our unity been so challenged. [...] There is no clash between national and European interests. Our shared interests can only be served by standing and acting together. Only the combined weight of a true union has the potential to deliver security, prosperity and democracy to its citizens and make a positive difference in the world. The interests of our citizens are best served through unity of purpose between Member States and across institutions, and unity in action by implementing together coherent policies (pp. 16–17).

However, the EU appears to be more divided than ever. It is not about the 'old' and the 'new' Europe anymore. The divisions are becoming more and more serious:

i.e. the divisions between the North and the South, the poor and the rich, the pro-austerity and the anti-austerity, and those states that support the Union's migration policies and others that oppose them – or even oppose the development of common migration policies. European societies are divided over such issues – and even the European choice as such. The EUGS emphasizes the significance of unity, but does not provide any solution for the problem of disunity, which should not have come as a surprise in a Union comprised (for now) of twenty-eight different member-states and a complex structure, but does not bode well for implementing the EUGS.

Even if the economic and refugee crisis had not damaged the EU's unity, a harmony of interests would have been unlikely if not impossible among twenty-eight member-states. Each member-state has its own strategy, interests, deficiencies and partnerships to serve, and in this way it affects the EU's action too (Tallis and Šimečka, 2017). The "expectations-consensus gap" has always been an obstacle to the EU's foreign and security policy (Toje, 2008b). For major issues in the areas of security and defence, even when member-states agree, they prefer to express their views, defend their interests and coordinate their actions from their capitals and not from Brussels under the Common Security and Defence Policy (Beauregard, 2016; Müller, 2016). Therefore, by looking for the lowest common denominator between twenty-eight member-states or even between the major powers within the EU under these circumstances, the EU is in danger of ending up either in paralysis or in overly modest action. Against this background and despite progress in security and defence integration, nine EU member-states – Germany, Belgium, the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, Estonia, Spain and Portugal – decided to form a joint European military intervention force in order to be able to respond collectively to crises in Europe's periphery (Salam, 2018). Although this involves a pragmatic approach which will also keep the UK close to its NATO allies, launching a non-EU initiative indicates the EU's difficulty in responding quickly and effectively to crises, and it does not seem like a vote of confidence in the EUGS.

The EU has to deal with the past experiences of twenty-eight different member-states and this is another factor that will impact upon the success or failure of the EUGS. Member-states have their own sensitivities and reflexes, which are independent of the EU and sometimes even in conflict with its policies while leading personalities in each member-state have their own experiences of the past that matter too (Mellander and Mouritzen, 2016). Moreover, this generation of European leaders draws on a variety of 'lessons of the past' which are rather different from those of the leaders who launched and advanced European integration and were more willing to fight nationalism and endorse cooperation and solidarity among the Europeans.

Beyond the unity among member-states, unity in EU action is also important. Having a flexible, coherent, and well-coordinated administration that is also able to innovate is indispensable for a small state's success (Thorhallsson, 2012). Yet, the complex EU administration has always placed the Union's foreign and defence policy in a predicament (Müller, 2016). The EU's external action is scattered across many different areas and levels. Of course, the Lisbon Treaty has put in place some improvements, and the European External Action Service has been an important step towards a more coordinated approach, but a lack of coherence and coordination still remains (Missiroli, 2013). In addition, member-states are very sensitive to issues of security and foreign policy and are reluctant to grant more responsibilities to the EEAS (Fabbrini, 2014; Müller, 2016). Moreover, the Commission plays an increasingly important role (Lavallée, 2013) and together with the European Parliament it exerts influence at different phases of the European foreign policy making (Riddervold and Rosén, 2016). The EUGS recognizes this predicament and calls for a more "joined up Union" and an integrated approach, which means that more cooperation among the EEAS, the institutions and the member-states is needed (p. 11). To this end, since the publication of the EUGS the EEAS has intensified its efforts on the internal-external nexus, which "means that internal and external initiatives within the same policy domain must be coherent and mutually reinforcing" (EEAS, 2017: 10; EEAS, 2018a). Also, for the next long-term EU budget (for 2021–2027) the Commission has proposed an increase of 30% to the EEAS budget in order for the EEAS to decrease the number of its instruments, simplify its structure, become more flexible and effective and increase its transparency (EEAS, 2018b).

Furthermore, the EUGS is in need of ownership. History tells us that for an important EU initiative to succeed, powerful figures from the big three or at least from two of them should strongly support it (Baun, 1995; Haine, 2003). This is not the case with the EUGS. Despite the broad consultation that preceded its drafting and publication, it considerably appears as a strategy of Mogherini and her team (Mälksoo, 2016). To be fair, that was also true for the European Security Strategy; it was Solana and his circle's strategy. What is more, UK voters decided to leave the EU. This means that one of the three regional great powers, the principal defence spender among the EU member-states and one of the two leading powers in the St. Malo initiative (Deighton, 2002) will not be part of the EU's power any more. It remains to be seen how this will impact upon the Union as the UK has been reluctant towards further integration in the areas of security and defence but also remains a partner of other European states through NATO and bilateral arrangements (Biscop, 2012; 2016c). In the absence of the UK's resistance, France and Germany have promoted a closer cooperation in the defence area in the spirit of the EUGS (Ayrault and Steinmeier, 2016) and as noted above, significant progress has been made in this re-

gard. In addition, the 30% increase to the EEAS budget (EEAS, 2018b) comes as a sign of recognition to both the EEAS work and the importance of the EU as a global actor for the years to come. That said, reinforcing the EU as a global actor has been an important priority of the Juncker Commission, whose term ends in 2019. Therefore, whether the EUGS will survive after Mogherini and Juncker leave their positions is a legitimate question.

Concerning political ideas and values, the EUGS is based on the noble narrative that sees the EU as a security, democracy and prosperity provider (Manners and Murray, 2016) and acknowledges that the EU's credibility and influence depend on its ability to preserve its values (pp. 8, 15). However, the EU's noble narrative is fading (Manners and Murray, 2016), while "illiberal democracy" is becoming a trend, and the levels of Euroscepticism, populism and nationalism are increasing all across the EU (Tallis and Sayer, 2017). Due to the economic crisis and waves of migration, anti-EU voices have been strengthened at the expense of the parties of the centre, the moderate pro-European parties that have supported the European integration and that are now losing power. The EU's democratic deficit, the recession, migration and austerity have encouraged radicalism and anti-integration forces. In the last European elections, European people sent more Eurosceptics than ever to the European Parliament. This came not only as a result of dissatisfaction with national governments and politics, but also as an expression of growing discontent with the EU and its policies (Treib, 2014). What is more, the BREXIT campaign has shown that in the era of disinformation campaigns and post-truth politics, it is easy to attack the EU no matter if your arguments are true or false (Marshall and Drieschova, 2018); the EU constitutes the ideal scapegoat. It should be expected that populists on either the left or the right will oppose the EUGS, and with their harsh and divisive language against European integration and their hostility to other cultures, they are going to damage the EU's image and unity further.

The EU cannot deal with populism unless it creates conditions for prosperity and fosters democracy at both the Union and national levels. It is clear that domestic politics and policies are inextricably connected with international policies, and international action impacts upon domestic arrangements. Thus, the EU cannot aspire to play a global role effectively unless it gets its own house in order first – although this is difficult when one's own house is actually many houses. Hence, although the EUGS identifies the importance of unity and of a 'joined-up' union, fighting disunity and building up coherence is a herculean task for the EU.

### **THE EU'S REPUTATION**

Lacking hard power, small states invest in their reputation and small state identity in order to promote their interests, gain allies and assume special roles in the international system; by being small they avoid the negative connotations usually attached

to great powers (Schmidl, 2001; Ingebritsen, 2002; Browning, 2006). Indeed, the EU's identity as a "good citizen" of the international system (Dunne, 2008), and its "power of attraction", which stems from the peace, prosperity, and democracy narrative – as well as the types of lives that many of its citizens lead – have been tremendous assets. The EU has been perceived as a model, a unique actor capable of bringing about prosperity and peaceful change in its region, and a truly entrepreneurial actor in international politics. Thus, the strategy is right to point out the importance of the EU's identity.

The EUGS underlines the significance of "our enduring power of attraction, the effectiveness and consistency of our policies, and adherence to our values" for the EU's efforts to transform its vicinity (p. 10). Yet, this power is now highly contested (Nielsen, 2013; Manners & Murray, 2016; Müller, 2016). Ahead of the UK referendum President Juncker himself admitted that "it is true we're not very popular when we advocate for Europe. We're no longer respected in our countries when we emphasise the need to give priority to the European Union. [...] The European project had 'lost part of its attractiveness'" (BBC 2016, April 19). Such a predicament has also been identified by both the Commission and the Parliament. It is also felt among European people. Although according to the Autumn 2015 Eurobarometer, people still hold positive representations of the EU, the part that thinks that the EU is "a waste of money" has slightly outstripped the part that believes that the EU stands for "a stronger say in the world."

Apart from the fact that the EU's image is not as attractive as it used to be, different people look at the EU in different ways. Natalia Chaban and Oliver Elgström (2014) find that perceptions of the EU as a global actor and leader are not uniform outside Europe; they vary and they are issue specific. Moreover, in contrast with the past, the EU is not the only player in its vicinity. Russia and China seek to expand their influence in the area and they can provide support without linking it to reforms, democratization, etc. Therefore they are becoming attractive and small states in the area try to keep all their options open and benefit as much as they can from the competition for influence (Nizhnikau, 2016). Thus, the EU's attractiveness seems to be suffering from a reputation crisis inside and outside the Union, which is further aggravated by disinformation campaigns against the EU. In addition, one should take into account that the EU's noble narrative of peace, prosperity and democracy was reinforcing the EU's 'power of attraction' in the 1990s because apart from its reasoning with reality, it was also compatible with that era of globalization when liberal ideas reigned. This does not mean that the EU should change its ideals, but simply that it should not take for granted that they remain of universal value.

That said, the EU, despite its crises, remains an integration project of unprecedented success. It continues to create value for European citizens and the world in-

side and outside Europe. What it needs is new narratives and effective public diplomacy inside and outside Europe to promote them. According to the EUGS annual reports the EU has worked for a more effective public diplomacy by seeking for more coordination among the different EU services across the world, targeting specific groups, e.g. the youth, and fighting disinformation by engaging with general and special audiences while presenting the advantages of a partnership with the EU as in the cases of Ukraine and Georgia (EEAS, 2017; 2018).

### **CONCLUSION: THE EUGS – STILL IMPORTANT, STILL A HERCULEAN TASK**

Two and a half years after the publication of the EUGS, this article has evaluated the strategy's potential against the state of the Union. It showed that in its efforts to implement its Global Strategy the EU faces challenges stemming from its relationships with great powers, from its internal politics and member-states' priorities, from the prevailing political ideas in Europe and the world, and from its own structure, as well as its reputation crisis. To overcome the lack of an existing tool for assessing the EUGS's prospects (and those of the EU more widely), the article introduced a framework based on Asle Toje's (2008a; 2010; 2011) conceptualization of the EU as a small power. This framework expanded on Toje's conceptualization by introducing factors that impact upon small state strategies' success or failure in the international system. For the purpose of this paper these factors were combined into four categories: a) systemic parameters, namely the EU's relationship with the great powers in the system; b) the developments in the EU's neighbourhood; c) the EU's 'internal' politics, including i) relations among the member-states, ii) relations between member-states and the EU's institutions, iii) coordination among the different EU actors, and iv) trending political ideas; and d) the EU's reputation. The framework facilitated the identification of the factors that impact upon the implementation of the EUGS and provided for a structured discussion of the challenges that the EU faces in implementing it.

Having discussed those challenges I argued that the EUGS constitutes an important document that is consistent with the EU's ambition to become a stronger global actor. However, in order to implement its strategy the EU has to respond to certain challenges. Plus, precisely the factors that affect the EUGS implementation are the following. At the systemic level, there is the tendency of the three great powers towards the unravelling of the liberal order on which the EU's creation and action have been based for more than six decades. Especially the US's change of stance towards the liberal order and the transatlantic relationship comes as an existential threat to the EU (Tocci, 2016). The extent to which the EU will manage to uphold its values, defend its interests and diversify its partnerships will be critical for the EUGS implementation but also for the EU's future. Concerning developments

in the EU's neighbourhood, its enlargement and resilience policies are steps in the right direction, but they have to be grounded in a more pragmatic approach that would take into consideration that neither the EU's vicinity nor the EU itself is what it used to be in the 1990s (Nitoiu and Sus, 2019). Also, the herculean task of being effective on the migration front inside and outside the Union and maintaining its unity confronts the EU and the EUGS. For the EU, to remain united amidst the rise of populism, nationalism and Euroscepticism is another arduous yet necessary task for the implementation of the EUGS. In a sense the EUGS's success and unity can be mutually reinforcing. The EU cannot become an effective global actor without its member-states maintaining unity in their diversity. At the same time the EUGS's success can be the glue that will keep the member-states together, while providing the European integration with a new impetus. That said, the proposal of a 30% increase to the EEAS budget, the progress that has been made in the security and defence integration, the EU's efforts for more coordination and its emphasis on public diplomacy - as both of the two latter accomplishments are recorded in the two EUGS annual reports - are positive signs of the EU's determination to implement its Strategy.

Only two years after the publication of the EUGS the world already looks very different. In this context, the EUGS annual reports constitute an important innovation, not only for mapping progress in the implementation of the EUGS, but also in the sense of complementing or correcting assumptions of the initial document when it is needed. To this end the framework introduced in this paper can be of value, not only because it can help identify the challenges that can impede the EU's action, as suggested before, but also because its small power approach looks at the EU's global actorness from a different perspective, emphasizing not only the EU's limitations, but also its special qualities that differentiate it from the great powers in the system. Small powers, despite their limitations, can find niches and create value for themselves and for the system. This is what the EU has done for more than six decades. Whether it will continue to do so or not depends on its drafting of appropriate strategies and, more importantly, on its ability to implement them successfully, which remains a herculean task.

## ENDNOTES

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