Rethinking European Futures

Eight Scenarios on European Foreign Policy Challenges 2025

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Sven Biscop

Locked out of the neighbourhood

As the EU becomes increasingly unable and unwilling to commit to the security of its neighbours and driven by concerns over an aggressive Russia and a volatile Middle East, they turn elsewhere for support. Thus, Europe's influence wanes, diminishing its ability to defend key interests in its surrounding states.

Trigger and response: It can freeze in the south, too

Europe had better things to export than the notion of a 'frozen conflict'. Yet, that is what the Middle East became after the war in Syria, and Iraq petered out into an uneasy ceasefire. After IS had finally been removed from the map, the remaining local actors could neither be defeated and driven out of the territory in which they were left in control, nor achieve victory and aggrandise their territorial reach. Outside actors gradually wound down their active military operations. Thus, Syria and Iraq, fractured into a series of semi-autonomous regions, struggled for space and outside support. So, too, the governments in Damascus and Baghdad, who still hoped to resume control over what had been their national territory.

The overwhelming ambition of the EU was not to get involved in this complex web of allegiances – certainly not militarily. Europe, too nervous about Russia, focused on eliminating the remaining terrorist threat to its own territory. The US had its hands full in Asia, as the Trump administration and China ratcheted up tensions. Therefore, Washington gave but token support to its erstwhile partners in the Middle East.

So the states and statelets in question looked elsewhere: to Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey. As they solidified relations with their respective clients, the Middle East got locked into a zero-sum game of mutually exclusive aspirations and alliances. And Europe got locked out: the Middle East became indifferent to an EU that seemingly had nothing to offer.

Thus, the southern and eastern neighbourhood went the same way. As the US distanced itself from them and even seemed to show weakened resolve in defence of its NATO Allies, Moscow had already strengthened its hold over countries wedged between Russia and the EU/NATO. Regretting its involvement in the Ukrainian quagmire of corruption and inertia, Europe timidly focused on its own defences inside NATO's Eastern border. That proved difficult enough. In spite of many grand declarations about European defence, Europeans had yet to integrate their fragmented defence efforts into an effective force. An emboldened Russia began to expand the Eurasian Economic Union into the defence sphere.

Complications and benefits: Interests and indifference

Surrounded by a ring of indifference, it became ever more difficult for the EU to defend its interests. The EU still spent significant amounts of money, but these were dwarfed by the vast sums dished out by Moscow and Riyadh. Furthermore, the new aim of increasing people's resilience against crises and threats was insufficient to give focus to its neighbourhood strategy. The EU never made clear what this meant when the main cause of people's insecurity is their own authoritarian government. In those fragile states and statelets in which national survival was at stake, the EU offer did not impress at all.

For many neighbours, the EU remained the most important trade partner. However, driven by a misunderstood doctrine of free trade, the EU remained reluctant to leverage trade in a geoeconomic way, pursuing political as well as economic objectives. As neighbours moved closer into the orbit of other external powers, European trade slowly began to suffer. The Russian and Saudi unidimensional economies might not support this spending spree forever though. Therefore, in the long term, the EU might still offer the better economic promise.

The growing disenchantment between Europe and Turkey constituted an additional complication. Brussels remained irritated by an increasingly authoritarian Erdoğan pursuing a Middle East policy directly at odds with its own, while Ankara perceived a total lack of understanding for its security concerns. With Turkey becoming a less-than-totally reliable NATO ally, European reluctance to offer security commitments to any non-members of the EU and NATO grew apace.

The only regional power with whom relations improved was Iran. Even though the nuclear agreement had just about held, US refusal to return to normal economic relations left the EU as the only western economy doing business with Iran. Only the EU was on speaking terms with both Tehran and Riyadh, putting it in a position to try and start a dialogue between the two in an attempt to end the stand-off in the Middle East – if it would be so inclined.

China was the other external power that might be inclined to support any such attempt. As other powers tightened their grip on their clients, China also found it increasingly difficult to penetrate the countries which it, too, had begun to see as neighbours. The 'Belt and Road' initiative appeared to be heading towards a dead end. However, Beijing would never take the initiative unless Europe acted first.

Conclusion: Where does this leave Europe in 2025?

Indifferent neighbours ended up being uncooperative, if not openly obstructive. Needing the support of Ankara, Moscow, Tehran or Riyadh, they had little motivation to deepen economic links with the EU or to work with Brussels in managing migration (which never went down to pre-war numbers), or in fighting terrorism (IS seemed of little concern to them compared to the territorial ambitions of their neighbours), or in halting the proliferation of weapons (many instead supported insurgents in their neighbours' territories). Under these conditions, there was little scope to improve governance even though the EU had identified state fragility as the main cause of instability in the neighbourhood. Having lost its influence, the EU had also lost the ability to defend its interests.

Crister S. Garrett

Translating economic transformation and trade: Toward a European geoeconomic strategy 2025

Cascading economic disruptions trigger cascading political disruptions. The result is the rise of a European Populist Political Economy upends European Social Liberal Order. The central challenge is to translate the transition from industrial to information societies into policies for sustainable societal security, thereby making Europe a credible geoeconomic power by 2025.

Trigger: Cascading economic disruptions trigger cascading political disruptions

The Great Recession, the Euro crisis and the accelerating Industry 4.0 (Digitalisation, A.I., Robotics) have involved a series of Cascading Economic Disruptions (CED) challenging basic assumptions about social and economic security on which European States and the European Union have built their narratives of legitimacy.

Due to the pace, depth and breadth of CED's, national governments found themselves increasingly placed in a passive role as opposed to being perceived by voters as actively constructing socio-economic security options. Not unlike the rapid rise of populist-reactionary political movements during the shift from agrarian to industrial societies, the early 21st century witnessed a transition from industrial to information societies and the emergence again of surging populist-reactionary movements. Of importance, these are anchored across society: among women and men, different generations, working class, middle class, rural and urban populations and among all levels of education. Inssence, CEDs disrupted basic societal institutions such as professions, family and status signifiers like education, income, and influence.

Brexit, French Presidency of François Fillon, ascent of AfD as the 3rd-largest party in the Bundestag, growing assertiveness of the Kaczyński regime in Poland, rising influence of national-populism in the Netherlands and in Scandinavia: these Cascading Political Disruptions (CPDs) emerging from CED rupture any notion of a centre for constructing EU global policy. The crumbling centre in Europe left it paralysed and searching for a new narrative to convince voters of its role as an active agent on behalf of the primary definition of daily security for citizens – involving a tangible sense of voice and agency with which to pursue sustainable socio-economic security (SSES).

Response

The CED > CPD dynamic unleashes a European Populist Political Economy (EPPE) threatening the European Social Liberal Order (ESLO). Growing support for EPPE is embedded in a vocabulary of protection, defence, and national localism – We vs Them. EPPE builds on zero-sum binary logics that seemingly reduce the pace, breadth and depth of change. To retain constructed binaries, EPPE policies seek to simplify the inherent complexity and fluidity of an ESLO engaging the unfolding of a global information economy.

Europe's response is fourfold. It introduces (1) an EU Basic Income, (2) EU Dynamic Thick Trade Agreements, (3) an Enhanced EU VAT, and (4) the post- Bismarck-Beveridge Social Insurance model.

By 2025, the four initiatives allow Europe to establish a sustainable European political economy and geoeconomic strategy; that is, a new synthetic narrative between domestic and foreign policy.

Complications and benefits

The four policies undertaken by the EU are meant to directly address EU's primary challenge of shifting from a 'passive narrative position' to an 'agency- driven narrative strategy'. That shift will involve pushing 'the European imagination' to create new 'policy spaces' where the EU can build sustainable socio-economic security institutions.

To build new policy spaces, the EU must appeal directly to the material interests of Europe's political classes, economic leaders, and citizens. To do so, it cannot simply reaffirm the vocabulary and narrative of ESLO – this will be rejected by populist politicians and significant portions of the population as 'tired political correctness and solutions'. Instead, it must engage the vocabulary, narrative, norms and interests of EPPE and concretely propose how policy initiatives outlined here can do a BETTER job of enhancing sustainable socio-economic security (SSES). Europe must translate an ESLO information society into a language intuitively understandable for adherents of EPPE.

Fear is the common denominator between EPPE and ESLO: fear of the decline of ESLO and fear of the decline of socio-economic security. Proponents of a sustainable ESLO must narrate how the absence of a shift in the authority for EU policy power will sharply radicalise (provincialise) European politics and weaken socio-economic security dramatically (to quote the classical realist, Benjamin Franklin, 'we all hang together, or we hang separately', proffered at a key moment in the shift of the 'American imaginary').

The debate will be contested and confrontational. In a best-case scenario, it will enjoy partial-but-sufficient shifts in 'European imaginary'. The benefits will be manifold. The EU Basic Income will allow a palpable feeling among EU citizens of a reliable, albeit minimal, daily security creating fresh socio-psychological space for re-engaging ESLO. Thick trade agreements – while perceived in many parts of the world as European normative neo-colonialism – will be perceived in Europe itself as possessing voice and agency in global politics. The EU VAT Enhanced will create 'burden-sharing' transparency, defusing EPPE rhetoric about 'free-loading' (and thereby enhancing EU authority). A post-Bismarck-Beveridge Social Insurance model will consolidate European geoeconomic power.

Status quo 2025:

The recalibration in Europe's normative and institutional architecture will lead to fresh resistance movements, including serious neo-nationalist agendas resisting ‘centralised power’. But with new tools, new legitimacy, new momentum and, most importantly, an agency-driven narrative, Europe will be tangibly better able to construct a SSES and, thereby, a sustainable ESLO.

The great powers China, Russia, and the United States will pursue divide et impera to weaken Europe as a geoeconomic and geopolitical power. Europe has already shifted the global imagination regarding itself as a ‘regulatory great power’. It needs to generate a shift in the global imagination of Europe as a geoeconomic great power. That process ‘begins at home’ with effective story- telling, resulting policies and emergent democratic legitimacy for shifts in the European imagination and, thus, European institutions.

Roderick Parkes

Migration crisis 2.0: The rise of the smuggler states

There are plenty of scenarios about irregular migration to Europe: fighting in Eastern Ukraine intensifies, Libya collapses further into anarchy, EU-Turkey deal breaks down or Turkey falls into civil war. Each of these scenarios sees irregular migration as a mere byproduct of international order. But with global mobility at an all-time high, how will irregular migrants define international order? The present scenario imagines 'state capture' – the emergence of smuggler states.

Trigger: What happened?

A classic trigger: a well-intentioned policy results in unforeseen consequences. In 2017, the EU massively scales up its training of Libyan border guards and security authorities. But there is a blind spot in this security sector reform (SSR) policy. Being a border guard in Libya is a part-time vocation – nobody can live on a border guard's tiny wage – something unknown to EU officials designing the training programmes. Plucked out of Libya and sent to Brussels, Libyan officials lose their ability to hold down a second job. To sustain their families, they resort to outside help and favours. They become a large and visible market for criminal organisations.

Returning to Libya, these EU-trained border guards also become a thorn in the side of their political masters. These EU-trained officials are irksome. In a move familiar from many previous SSR programmes, they find themselves marginalised and demoted by the new government. Owing cash to criminal gangs and in possession of expertise and political links stretching across both sides of the Mediterranean, they form the foundations for a Libyan smuggling state. Consequently, months after it began its training programme, the EU is surprised to witness a spike in the numbers of people passing through Libya. The coast guard has become a rent-seeking part of the smugglers' business model. The rest of the state soon follows.

Response: How did Europe/the EU react?

The EU's response is another classic policy misfire. Faced with a growing number of people crossing the Central Mediterranean in Summer 2018, EU member states further restrict their border controls. They pull back Operation Sophia, following widespread media criticism that the naval mission is merely acting as a taxi service. This restriction leaves thousands of young African workers kettled on the North African coastline, creating a trapped irregular workforce. In a first really impressive example of cooperation among Libya's border-guard forces, the Libyan state ensures that these young migrants are not permitted to move back home across Libya's southern border.

These border restrictions have the effect of pushing the bounty for people smuggling through the roof. Alongside the familiar people-smuggling model as a high-risk mass business, a new market emerges for high-paying migrants. The growth of this kind of high-end smuggling neatly exploits the EU's existing governance weaknesses. For a decade, the EU's border authorities have been subject to

budget cuts and austerity programmes. Its border services are ripe for bribery and corruption – including at the highest political level in the sale of passports and residence rights – and the commercialisation of 'assisted traveller programmes' become a valuable revenue stream in small EU states hit by the Eurozone crisis.

Complications/benefits:
What hampers Europe's/the EU's response and/or what opportunities are there?

The EU's response is further complicated by the way the smugglers erode and corrupt legitimate communications and transport links. Too late, the EU recognises that its web of visa-free relations with Eastern European and Latin American countries is being exploited and, in particular, the decision to offer Columbia and Brazil visa-free access to the Schengen Area is backfiring. High-paying migrants are being smuggled out of Libya to Latin America where they are kitted out with documentation to show that they are legitimate tourists. Soon enough, African and Middle-Eastern migrants are being smuggled out of Guinea Bissau by fishermen and the existing narco-trading gangs into Brazil then into Europe.

Trickier still is the way that the smugglers increase their business by using communications tools like the internet, GPS technologies and wire transfers. Initially this is just for practical purposes, to ensure they get people and money across borders quickly. But the criminals become political: they are using social media to influence European discussions about their humanitarian obligations. They co- opt European NGOs into their business model, encouraging them to help smuggle people out of Libyan waters into Europe. They even start providing legitimacy for their smuggler state.

Status quo 2025: Where does this leave Europe/the EU?

With UN discussions in 2017 about a new approach to migration and forced displacement, the EU had a brief window to help reform the global system of mobility. However, with Switzerland and Mexico in the driver's seat for these processes, they degenerate into a fight between the global North and South – developing economies demanding cash in return for holding back the flow of people. Across Africa and the Middle East, the EU resorts to a mix of gargantuan development spending and containment. The EU begins rewriting the map of its neighbourhood, re-bordering and re-ordering its surroundings.

This is in evidence along the three major migration routes into Europe. The EU stems the 'Balkan route' by reinforcing border controls between Turkey and Greece, and redirects development spending from Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey into the EU itself. Meanwhile, along the 'Rabat route', the burgeoning economies of West Africa prove hugely uncooperative – relieved to see their exploding populations heading north for Europe. The EU is tied to its policy of trying to use transit states, Niger and Libya, as buffers. By contrast, along the 'Khartoum route', transit states, like Sudan and Egypt, demand too high a price for holding back the flow of people. The EU finds itself making deals with authoritarian countries of origin like Eritrea.

Christian Mölling

The breaking of the EU: Europe is unprepared against a hybrid attack

A full spectrum attack

in 2019, just before the UK finally leaves the EU, the 'Northern African Islamist Force' (NAIF) starts an intervention from Libya and Morocco to Gibraltar and into Southeastern Spain. Their aim is to extend the caliphate, which they have built over the last years in Northern Africa, into their old Kingdoms of 'al Andalus' and Catalonia. Almost simultaneously, NAIF supporter groups inside the EU (mainly in French banlieues and some British, German and Italian cities) start riots and undermine public order.

Cyber attacks flanking the assault turned off border protection and surveillance systems, partly destroyed energy grids, and also damaged hospital and airport infrastructures. Support by Russian players and Spanish insiders have been enabling factors.

At the same time, 120,000 people (attempt to) cross the Russian border into the three Baltic states, asking for political asylum. Half of them are or have been Russian soldiers, several are identified as special forces who have fought/been on holidays in Ukraine; the other half are from different minorities in Russia.

Meanwhile, Russia has declared restarting nuclear tests and fired a new generation of nuclear capable cruise missile from a submarine just off the Norwegian coast close to Stavanger (NATO Joint Warfare Centre).

Europe's best response

Spain wants to simultaneously activate Article 42.7 TEU and 222 TFEU, which propels EU institutions and their personalities to an inward fight over prioritisation and competencies they would gain.

However, Paris aims to block both invocations as this would heat up the situation in its banlieues where police and armed forces are already heavily fighting against riots started with the NIAF invasion. The UK does not want to support the invocation because it could rebound back into the EU forcing it to support Spain attempting to re-take Gibraltar.

Eventually, none of the EU states offers significant immediate help. Baltics fear the overthrow of their states and society by the immediate risk. Others fear they become more vulnerable once they have sent their security forces abroad.

Meanwhile, Spain declared martial law across the country. Simultaneously, Catalonia declares independence from the rest of Spain. It states its willingness to find an agreement

with NIAF based upon its autonomy status and the analysis that Spain is the common enemy. When unconfirmed reports on television and twitter messages stated that one of those responsible for the

cyber attack at a hospital was a Catalan of Libyan origin, lootings of Catalan properties and riots start in Madrid and elsewhere.

Spain also invokes Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, yet the US vetoes any NATO support because Spain has not fulfilled NATO's 2% goal on defence spending.

The US invites the EU to live up to its ambition to act and handle crises autonomously. It is seriously occupied by the Middle East wars that President Trump has launched since 2018, and still waits for Europe to contribute to the burden sharing in the Asia Pacific area. Yet, Trump offers bilateral support to the UK and Spain if they join his fight against what he calls the Evil Islamist Empires: many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Pakistan.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) High commissioner for minority rights insists on EU's obligation to offer asylum to persecuted minorities. Russia offers to 'take care' of those 'illegal migrants' if Western Europe (EU and NATO) formerly recognise "Novo Russia" territories (formerly known as Crimea and Ukraine) as Russian territories. Facing the overthrow of their public order, France and Italy, as well as the Baltic states, support that deal.

EU leaders are not able to agree on any humanitarian or police/military support for the Baltic states to deal with Russian refugees, because the French President blocks any motion that criticises Russia. For the same reason, they are not able to condemn the nuclear test.

During the celebrations of the 5th EU Security Council – theme 'Protection matters: this time we mean it' – EU leaders issue a joint statement in which they strongly condemn the assaults on Spain and Gibraltar expressing their solidarity with Madrid and London, and offer humanitarian aid and conditional political asylum to refugees able to make their way through the Spanish civil war regions to the Pyrenees.

The elusive Union

The real strategic challenge to European Foreign Policy is its internal basis. Effective and legitimate governance is key to ensure the capacity to act, no matter what threat or challenge the EU might face. The EU and Europe lack political unity and preparedness/capacity to act – the two key elements of effective and legitimate governance. The continued overselling of the 'EU' brand contrasted by continued underperformance measured against the self-identified problems is self-poisoning, offers an open flank for criticism and compels many to turn their backs against the Union. Eventually, many players, not only the EU bubble, seem out of touch with the realities of their environment. Situational awareness, as well as the knowledge about the interest of partners and adversaries, and about their capacity to act seem either unavailable or not actionable.

The political Union has been compromised for a long time by the EU Member States. While, in reality, they are weak, interconnected and dependent on others; national decision-makers desperately hang on to the illusion of national sovereignty, strength, autonomy and independence.

The EU does not exist as a reference object for security beyond the Brussels' bubble. At the same time, this bubble has even over exaggerated its talk about the EU as a security provider and its vision of a security union. Thus, the gap between security discourses within the EU is widening.
The growing influence of nationalist and populist agendas on foreign and security policies will impact political consensus and effective decision-making within the EU making it less feasible.

Status quo 2025: The incomprehensive approach

The Interlinkage of the challenge clusters is not mirrored by an interlinkage of the response. Neither is the necessary political idea of a common and comprehensive response taken into practice, nor is the institutional setting addressing this interconnectedness, nor do the capacities to act and the resources. Instead of the 'comprehensive approach' the EU and its States preach, the approach is isolated regarding the clusters and fragmented regarding the coherence of action taken by the various players in response to individual clusters and, as a result, ineffective regarding risk/threat mitigation and damaging to the idea of the EU. Thus, the EU no longer distinguishes itself from its elements or against its environment.

Niels van Willigen
Crisis in South-Eastern Europe

In 2025, a crisis erupts between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. Both countries are on the threshold of becoming EU members. One of the two entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serb Republic, decides to secede. Emboldened by this move, the Serb community in the north of Kosovo declares independence from Kosovo. The developments are supported by the incumbent nationalist government in Serbia as well as by the Russian government.

The disintegration of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo

It is the year 2025. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia are on the threshold of becoming EU members. They fulfil all the accession criteria and await a formal decision. However, domestic pressures from EU-sceptical political forces and a deteriorating political situation in Bosnia and Serbia have made European leaders unwilling to take a positive decision on accession. Now, after months of increasing tensions, the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina deteriorates quickly. One of the two constitutional entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serb Republic, decides to secede from Bosnia. By doing so, it ends the status quo established with the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995. Bosnia and Herzegovina – consisting of the Serb Republic and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – threatens to fall apart. In reaction to the developments in Bosnia, Serb communities in the north of Kosovo (also still a candidate country for EU membership) feel strengthened in their wish to join Serbia. They declare independence from Kosovo and invite the Serbian government to realign borders with Kosovo in such a way that the Serb communities become part of Serbian territory.

The incumbent nationalist government in Serbia welcomes the developments in Bosnia and Kosovo. Moreover, Russia expresses its support for the Bosnian Serbs and Kosovar Serbs, and warns the EU not to 'hinder the Serbian people in determining their own future.' However, the Bosnian and Kosovar governments strongly resist the secession attempts. Tensions quickly escalate: violence is about to erupt. Reports are getting out that Russia secretly supports the secessionists both with weapons and advice. There are even reports that Russian 'advisers' are present in the Serb Republic training the separatists. In reaction to these reports, the government of Bosnia calls on the EU to protect the territorial integrity of the Bosnian state.

A European reaction angering Russia

The EU strongly condemns the secession attempts of the Serbian communities. The EU sees the prospective membership of Serbia and Bosnia within their current borders as the capstone of decades of EU conflict management in the region and is adamant in solving this crisis. Moreover, several EU Member States want to avoid creating precedents that might inspire secessionist movements in their own countries. Therefore, the EU decides to take all necessary measures to ensure the territorial integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. Since Bosnia is not formally an EU member yet, it cannot invoke the EU Lisbon Treaty's collective defence clause (Article 42.7). However, given the fact

that Bosnia is on the brink of EU membership, the fear of further Russian escalation and that the EU considers this crisis as a litmus test of its security and defence policy, Brussels and EU Member States are willing to act as if Bosnia is already a full member. Therefore, the EU calls upon its Member States to organise a collective defence of Bosnia. This call to arms is strongly condemned by Russia. Nevertheless, several EU countries send troops to Bosnia and Kosovo with the aim of preventing the secession to materialize. Moscow reacts with economic sanctions against the EU, building up its support for the separatists and threatens military action in order to 'liberate the Bosnian and Kosovar Serbs from their European oppressors'.

Europe stands (almost) alone

The EU is on its own in tackling this crisis. First, because (echoing the words of a former US Secretary of State in the 1990s), the United States (US) government has declared not to have a 'dog in this fight'. Also, the US does not want to jeopardise its improved relationship with Russia and strongly believes the EU should solve this crisis itself. Therefore, the US blocks any action within NATO. Second, because the United Nations (UN) Security Council does not condemn the separatist moves. Russia threatens to block any resolution with a veto and UN action is, therefore, not to be expected. Although the country is outside the EU since Brexit, the United Kingdom sides with the EU (both politically and military) and continues its long-term commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The absence of the USA in this crisis makes it the first serious test of European collective defence. Article 42.7 of the EU Lisbon Treaty was invoked for the very first (and hitherto only) time in November 2015, by France in reaction to the terrorist attacks in Paris. The EU Member States have only limited experience with collective defence and only within the context of a terrorist threat, as opposed to a threat from a large military power. Ever since the (as yet unresolved) crisis in Ukraine in 2014, relations between the EU and Russia deteriorated. So far, Moscow has been cautious when it concerned NATO and/or EU Members, but this time the Russian government seems to be ready to escalate militarily.

Surviving or perishing

After the euro crisis, Brexit and the ever-decreasing popular support for the EU, this crisis could actually mean the end of the EU as we know it. In fact, the crisis could lead to one out of three possibilities: a strengthening of the EU, weakening of the EU or even EU dissolution. On the one hand, external political and military pressure from Moscow could unite EU Member States and, in the absence of NATO and the US, strengthen the EU as a collective security and defence provider. For this to happen, the EU must have sufficient capabilities and political will to deter Russia and also be sufficiently united in its aim to prevent the secessions. On the other hand, the EU could be seriously weakened or even fall apart if it becomes clear the EU does not have the capacity and/or will to face Russia over Bosnia and Kosovo.

Alexandra de Hoop Scheffer

Europe in 2025: Managing fragmentation and accepting tradeoffs

In 2025, the international order will continue to be challenged everywhere. European governments will have to change the practice of how order is established or re-established, (re)define their cooperation with other powers, and accept tradeoffs by identifying where they can be flexible and develop a functionalist way to deal with cooperation, including with the United States. Rather than looking for ways to prevent fragmentation, Europeans, along with their American ally, need to think about how to manage fragmentation constructively as nationalist reflexes and instincts of strategic retrenchment seem inevitable.

Disorder in the South, new order in the East and reorder in Asia

In 2025, the international order will continue to be challenged everywhere: Europe will still be dealing with the intermestic implications of disorder in Africa and the Middle East (terrorism, refugee flows fuelled by conflicts, failing states and repressive regimes) while facing Russia's assertive pursuit of a new order in the East and other regions where it seeks to destabilise Europe's security interests and interfere in European politics. In Asia, China will continue to pursue re-order in the South China Sea and consolidate its economic and military footprint in Africa and the Middle East. By 2025, Russia and China – and also powers like Iran and Turkey – will have consolidated their status as both key geopolitical players and regional spoilers.

Europe's Response: A mix of Strategic Postures

In this context, Europe will have to (re)define its relationship and cooperation with these powers, and change the practice of how order is established or re- established. The 1990s were the 'humanitarian' decade and the post-1990s to post-9/11 decades were the 'expeditionary' decade, with very mixed results. The year 2014 (with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the emergence of ISIS) opened a new period of 'fog of policy'.

Facing threats of a different nature, European Member States will combine a mix of tools without a clear strategy and engage in two distinct yet simultaneous strategic postures: in the East, a passive posture of defence and deterrence vis- à-vis Russia; in the South, a more active posture of containment, targeted 'droning' against terrorists and economic assistance to fragile states. Because of budget constraints, economic assistance will rely more on public-private partnerships, with non-state actors and businesses being mobilised to invest in fragile economies. However, it is very unlikely that Europe will return to an Afghanistan-type of 'nation-building' operation.

Considering limited progress made in building a European defence and because of diverging priorities, the response to neighbouring crises will not be an EU response but will combine the French

model of unilateral and limited military intervention plus ad hoc minilateral coalitions, with or without US assistance. Likewise, the transatlantic security partnership will be increasingly defined by a pragmatic approach to coalition building and military intervention. Coalitions of the willing will rapidly be used to face specific crises, but the Alliance will continue to lack a common strategy on out-of-area interventions.

A more fragmented EU and transatlantic partnership

European governments will continue to narrow the focus on their national and short-term interests. The rise of populism across Continental Europe will further the trend towards political and strategic fragmentation. Fragmentation will lead European states to act more unilaterally and less within the EU framework. Also, homeland security will prevail over defence and defence budget increases will be diverted to domestic security.

As the US leadership continues to morph into a more US-centric and unilateral power, the transatlantic partnership will be deeply affected. This will be very problematic because transatlantic cooperation is essential in managing crises. The question of transatlantic burden sharing will remain extremely relevant, but Europeans will not be able to meet US expectations. In this context, a core group of European partners will engage in a clear differentiation of their goals and relationships with Washington.

Status quo 2025: Managing fragmentation at home, outsourcing and accepting tradeoffs abroad

Rather than looking for ways to prevent fragmentation, Europeans need to think about how to manage fragmentation constructively, as nationalist reflexes and instincts of strategic retrenchment seem inevitable. However, the idea of an isolationist Europe (or United States) is absurd. The 'West' will continue to intervene – rather by necessity than by choice – and have to deal with the implications of its interventions. The question is how to best utilise military power? What tools to use in the face of non-military destabilising threats (e.g. cyber threats/electoral interference)?

Recent history shows that non-intervention can lead to either a costlier intervention or other powers intervene (e.g. Russia in Syria). Likewise, lessons learned from Libya and Syria show that neither defence capacity building nor drone strikes are a substitute for strategy. Taking advantage of the transatlantic powers' strategic paralysis, non-Western powers will intervene more with the aim of preserving the status quo and consolidating their influence in regions where Europe and the US are disengaging. Crisis management will increasingly rely on cooperation with other powers who do not share US and European interests and values, but who have direct stakes in the conflicts and their outcome (particularly in the Middle East).

This will lead to increasing outsourcing to regional powers, like Turkey, Iran and the Gulf States, or even with powers like China which will have increased its military footprint and political influence in the region by 2025. European (and American) foreign policy could also end up perpetually containing

threats regionally through a combination of quasi-permanent special forces, ad hoc counterterrorism operations, economic assistance and 'dirty' deal-making with
regional powers.

All these 'middle ground' approaches are very imperfect and risky. Therefore, the future of Europe's role in the world will be shaped by the notion of tradeoffs. The European countries need to identify where they can be flexible, what key aspects of the international order they want to preserve, and develop a functionalist way to deal with cooperation. Will Europe accept spheres of influence and go back to 19thcentury diplomacy practices? The security environment, used opportunistically by Russia, will force European countries into a form of partnership with Russia in the MENA, and a new status quo will emerge in Eastern Europe despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and Russian provocations in its near neighbourhood.

Oliver Gnad

An ever-hollower Union in a strong men's world

A rise of right-wing populism undermines European governments, while a continuous war in the Levant and state fragility in Africa lead to mass migration to Europe. Meanwhile, US isolationism and a declining world order leave the EU to its own devices. At the same time, autocrats turn to geopolitics and get away with fait accomplis. The EU shrinks to a trade union but manages to better organise collective security.

Free fallin', or: The rest of the West

In retrospect, it was in 2017 when the European Union lost its cause: even though a conservative 'Coalition of the Decent' omitted a far-right presidency under Marine Le Pen, the French presidential elections led to a massive shift to the right forcing the new President to respond to populist sentiments.

Half a year later, in September 2017, the voters turned against Angela Merkel. Even though the Christian Democrats received more votes than any other party in Germany's general elections, she lost her chancellorship due to a splintered party representation in the Bundestag and the Social Democrats' unwillingness to enter into a Grand Coalition again.

Strong indicators notwithstanding, no-one ever proved that Vladimir Putin exerted undue influence in both elections. But at home, his promise to 'Make Russia Great Again' gained him not only extraordinary popularity but led to his fourth presidency. From March 2018 onwards, Putin ruled his country with an even harder iron fist and staged himself as a 'New Tsar'.

At the same time, Putin's brother-in-arms, the Turkish President Recep Erdoğan, succeeded in consolidating his one-party regime and became the 'Strong Man at the Bosporus'. After forging an unholy alliance with the Kremlin and a secretly negotiated Modus vivendi with Tehran, Turkey – with the active support of Moscow – intervened in Northern Iraq and Syria to fight Kurdish nationalism and secure a buffer zone along its southern borders.

This resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to temporary safe- havens in Lebanon and Jordan. To ease the pressure on these countries, Erdoğan denounced the refugee deal with the European Union in the summer of 2018.

Meanwhile, the new US President has started to implement the so-called 'Trump Doctrine': a gradual withdrawal from global affairs – with huge implications for the EU and NATO. Determined to follow his leitmotif 'America First', Trump steered the country away from 'Foreign entanglements' (Greater Middle East, North Africa, East Europe, South China Sea) and from 'Entangling Alliances'. He also realigned foreign trade through bilateral trade agreements – with a sole but important exception: a slimmed-down free trade agreement with the European Union.

Against this backdrop, the US administration's blind eye on climate change appeared almost like a marginal side effect of Trump's 'New Isolationism'. While highly affected US Federal States like California held their climate- friendly course, Washington remained indifferent. At the end of Donald Trump's first term, the US has become a laggard and free-rider in international climate diplomacy.

Stemming the tide while standing in quicksand

With London's 'Splendid Isolation' after Brexit, America's holidays from world affairs, a lack of political continuity in Paris and Berlin, and decreasing EU legitimacy at home and abroad due to its inability to manage the manifold crises, the years between 2018 and 2025 are being characterised by trends forming a recipe for a perfect storm. In the Levant, an ongoing messy war with constantly changing patterns of conflict is being fought as a proxy conflict of big powers from the region and beyond (On the ground: regular armed forces and militias from Russia, Saudi-Arabia, Iran, and Turkey. In the air: Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany – but without a UN mandate).

The rationale of the autocrats: setting the stage for 21st-century geopolitics. The rationale of the EU: omitting a conflagration throughout the Greater Middle East, ending the refugee crisis and stabilising Lebanon and Jordan.

Without success: due to the radicalisation of Islamist groups and the endless influx of refugees, the state of Lebanon collapses. Seizing the opportunity, Shiite radicals force King Abdullah of Jordan to abdicate. After a 70-year reign, the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan ends in an Islamist coup d'état – with massive security repercussions for Israel.

While the Greater Middle East is in flames and threatens the security and stability of North Africa and the Old Continent, the situation in Africa aggravates steadily, fomenting almost unnoticed.

From Mali and Nigeria in the West, to Ethiopia and Somalia in the East, state fragility and state failure intensifies. Soon, the culmination and cross- fertilisation of other stress factors – such as the massive growth of populations and an increasingly discontent youth bulge, the exacerbating impact of climate change and water scarcity – lead to heated conflicts over resources and access to infrastructures between ruling elites, ethnic groups and proxies (such as radical Islamist groups). Africans in the millions flee their countries – destabilising neighbouring states and societies.

The shackles of populism and appeal of strong men

Forced by popular sentiments, the German and other European governments finally decide to fence themselves off. Together with Germany, France, Italy and the Visegrad countries establish a rigid border regime from the Bosporus across the Mediterranean Sea to the Strait of Gibraltar.

Remaining investors from EU countries withdraw their assets from the Levant and African countries, turning instead to domestic markets. A severe economic recession ensues which this time also affects the highly export-driven German economy.

By 2025, 'Fortress Europe' has become a reality, globalisation Western style has come to an end while millions of refugee strand at the shores of North Africa and in refugee camps throughout the Levant.

Authoritarian regimes, such as Putin's Russia, Erdoğan's Turkey, and the theocrats in Tehran, seize the opportunity to make inroads into the declining international order to further weaken the European Union and to build up their respective cordons sanitaires. Geopolitics rules.

Even though it suffers economically from these developments, China sticks to its unilateral and basically peaceful course. While being more assertive after the proclamation of the 'Trump Doctrine', the regime nonetheless extends its influence only through soft power means – trade and the establishment of a parallel universe of international institutions (e.g. the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank [AIIB]).

By 2025, China – with its strategic patience and cool temper – has become the only non-contested world power. Its new version of Globalisation – 'One Road, One Belt' and a pragmatic collaboration with regional powers – shifts the centre of gravity from the Western hemisphere to Central Asia. The New Silk Road is the new lifeline on the Eurasian Continent, controlled and fuelled by a pragmatic alliance of former pariahs: China, Iran, Russia and Turkey.

A trade union with guts (but few balls)

By 2025, the world has become a polycentric world with clear spheres of influence and a high degree of tension, fragility and conflict. The European Union is reduced to a trade union which fences itself off from inconveniences and threats of the surrounding world. But in one policy field, the European Union is more integrated: in the realm of defence and security.

Fabrizio Tassinari

Renationalisation: The poison that will serve as antidote

2015 might have witnessed the nadir of Europe's integrationist gospel with the physical domino of border controls spiralling into a metaphysical one of policy-making renationalisation. As illustrated by the migration policy case, EU foreign policy coordination in 2025 will turn renationalisation into Europe's most precious resource.

Trigger: What happened?

Because Europe has not been confronted with a shock comparable to the 2015 refugee crisis, inertia has taken over. By 2025, no systematic reform of the European migration policy regime has taken place. No viable adjustment or revision has followed the unravelling of the Schengen and Dublin regimes, a reinstatement of which has taken place piecemeal. Domestic governance structures find themselves in a permanent crisis mode, reactivated with every new significant wave of arrivals. Continuing pressure on borders and welfare systems has also altered voters' perceptions on a permanent basis, enabling populist parties to rule or be part of majority coalitions in over one-third of EU Member States.

Response: How did Europe/the EU react?

By 2025, the external response to migration challenges regularly takes the shape of ad hoc coalitions, which form the embryo of more established alliances, tied to specific initiatives. The 2016 EU-Turkey deal provides the blueprint for how the EU modus operandi changes vis-à-vis established European consensus-building mechanisms. The 'migration compacts', agreed by the EU with five Sub-Saharan African countries and spearheaded by Italy, are expanded to other Sub-Saharan and South Asian countries. The choice of partner countries is often controversial, paving the way for an overhaul of the Geneva Conventions, particularly as far as family reunification principles are concerned.

Larger EU States, notably Germany, France and Italy, continue to take the lead either unilaterally or in concert with small group of like-minded countries. In most cases, EU institutions find themselves merely in the position to rubber-stamp the fait accompli, for example, in relation to the extraordinary circumstances justifying the reestablishment of border controls on the part of a Member State. In the long run, this way of operating has shifted the signpost of what is considered acceptable by individual Member States to do in absence of EU consensus. It will lead to recriminations and resentment and to the emergence of precedents to be appealed to when motivating unorthodox initiatives.

Complications/benefits: What hampers Europe's/the EU's response and/or what opportunities are there?

In 2025, the notion of an 'ever-closer union' is no longer in the cards as far as EU foreign policy coordination is concerned. The governance of EU foreign and security policy will mostly be devoted to devise instruments enabling existing EU institutions to maximise their operational capability, as in the case of the European border and coastguard. Variable geometries of Member States coordination will be driven by geographical proximity, normative alignment, response to domestic pressure or emergencies.

Throughout the decade up to 2025, migration has also shown a way for national policy makers to devise policies in which the EU features as part of the solution, often only by virtue of its sheer size. As in the case of the EU-Turkey deal, the EU is not a scapegoat but a context used by individual or avant-gardes of Member States from which a more pragmatic, even cynical, European foreign policy emerges as a result.

Status quo 2025: Where does this leave Europe/the EU?

For a good part of the next decade, ripple effects of Brexit and the Trump presidency are likely to make a renationalisation scenario plausible, if not dominant. For all its controversy, migration showcases how renationalisation can be turned on its head to further European solutions and interests. Migration will continue to force European policy makers to act and seek support and coordination among them as they go along. In doing so, Member States will have to reassess their policy repertoire, shelving formal and informal consensus- building mechanisms acquired through decades of EU cooperation in favour of a more functional and realpolitik toolkit, including brinkmanship, bandwagoning and, of course, alliance building.

In such a context, EU foreign policy can become part of the equation not as a normative and legal framework or as the paramount forum of political deliberation, but as an instrument to maximise interests, publicize policy proposals, gain leverage, pressure and cajole counterparts. EU foreign policy will come out stronger not because of its moral high ground or technocratic rigour, but because of its ability to deliver tangible results for the safety and welfare of European citizens – something to which national policy makers can realistically piggyback. Success in carving such a counter-narrative, whereby urgency is defused by factoring Europe in, while depriving the populist right of some of its signature arguments, might represent the most genuine challenge and opportunity for the European establishment in the decade to come.