

## ECFR's Foreign Policy Strategy Group meeting

Rethinking Europe's role in its near abroad, Berlin, 9 May 2016

The following is a summary of the two brainstorming sessions held in Berlin on Europe's foreign policy and current challenges. The document is intended to be a short, unofficial record of the topics discussed along with the range of opinions they provoked. It should not be assumed that all participants agree with all the opinions set out. 'We' and 'our' are used as shorthand for citizens and policy makers of the EU.

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### Buffet lunch discussion on the current state of European affairs

#### General institutional trends

While the positions of member states are drifting apart, the institutional trend within the EU is going in the other direction, towards renationalisation and informalisation of decision making. The EU is in a half way place, it is more capable collectively than it was in 1995, but not up to the task of handling the big ongoing crises. Two forces are at play simultaneously: there is an internal logic contesting Europe's postmodern values, driving us apart. At the same time, the external logic of a more challenging international context is pushing us together again. The external challenges are important but we don't have a recipe to deal with them, and we are no longer a union with self-confidence, economic growth, and belief in the European project. The EU needs to become better at formulating policies where the internal and the external come together. There is a need to look at question of structures and institutions. Developments from '95 included all member states, we need to abandon that idea for more informality and flexible geometry. In the EU we still have a common foreign policy, not a single foreign policy, there has been an ambiguity from the start. Important to be doing something, i.e. united military action.

The renationalisation trend can be exemplified by the way quint meetings in the EU used to be very secret, but now it is very clear where member states are doing things in different small groups. It is good for EU foreign policy if the larger states agree on policy, this is oil for the machinery. But at some point smaller member states will feel that they are no longer part of it, in which case we will lose both cohesion and resources. The EEAS is contributing to "*quintification*" of EU foreign policy by involving bigger countries more than smaller countries. There are probably grounds for a comprehensive coalition package where the demand is high. If European policy makers could an extra effort to reach out to these countries on the bigger things, momentum will be generated, not just on foreign policy.

#### Global Strategy Review

A major topic this year is the Global Strategy Review, which will be of importance for foreign policy shaping in next decade. Europe needs both a strong focus on the region and to be a more global player. Some fear that the outcome of the Global Strategy will not be used, in part because it might lack in ambition. This narrative of a lack of ambition can also be damaging. The final document should have a clear action plan, built on success stories of the past. When the plans for a new Global Strategy first emerged, the goal was not to write a document, but to have a debate. We are not the only consumers of the outcome, it is also our communication to the outside world. If we end up with the lowest common denominator, and are not able to convince our own citizens, we should have the option on the table to not finalise at this point.

There are currently two realities in Europe. On the one hand, there is the Global Strategy process, where people sit around at tables for a discussion and work out how to say bland things that won't upset anyone. On the other hand, we have an EU that does not agree on a lot, where it is impossible to have a discussion on what we want to be saying. On Iran, it was useful for countries to have Solana present, not so much to have Mogherini there with the Normandy format. Where could she be uniquely useful? Are there any issues where member states are not that engaged and EU institutions could have a role on pushing things forward? The strongest cases used as arguments for the EEAS scheme actually don't need the whole EEAS set-up. One example might be CSDP missions around the world.

Some member states are not very happy with the way the Global Strategy document has been negotiated. The drafts have not been shared with everyone, both smaller and larger countries find the process non-transparent.

### The Middle East

One of the most important topics facing the EU is its policy towards the Middle East. There is no alternative to moving forward; ultimately muddling through and being reactive is how we got to the current situation. The Middle East is currently in a *cul de sac*, but it will come out and establish new orders. As the American era in the Middle East is over, there is the question of new security structure in the Middle East. Saudi, Iran, Turkey will be pillars of new security structure, including sooner or later Egypt and even Israel.

## SESSION 1 – Crisis default: coming to terms with Europe's near abroad

### Introduction

Policy solutions that draw on the model of enlargement are no longer relevant. 'Be more like us' won't work anymore, because Europe's crises have made it less of an example for outsiders. We need to restart the EU model to make it legitimate with our own citizens again, as well as effective in shaping the world around us. If the neighbourhood approach is going to be strategic, it has to be comprehensive. We should not talk ourselves into the perspective that we could be choosing between full engagement or not; either we engage across the spectrum or our interventions will be less effective.

### Eastern Neighbourhood

The litmus test is what we can achieve in the Eastern Neighbourhood. Can we afford to do business as usual or is this a challenge that would merit the pooling of Europe's resources? We can't just contain the Russians, we need to engage. Although the EU's diplomatic power vis a vis Russia lies largely at national level, there is no process among member states to mandate ourselves to act on this issue. Nobody can send Merkel to do diplomacy on behalf of the EU; she sends herself if she goes. There is no sense of design to allow several of us to do something and others to believe they still have ownership. This situation is now tolerated for lack of an alternative.

### Southern Neighbourhood

On the Southern Neighbourhood, the principal drivers of conflict are perfectly known to us, but it is more difficult to see what we can actually achieve. Social unrest, failing governance, economic weakness: all have been with us for well over two decades. Still, we are not acknowledging how fragile our main partners such as Libya and Egypt are. Typically, we strategize and then emergencies in the form of terrorism or migration problems emerge, leading us to abandon our strategies. We have to discuss the substance of shared counter terrorism policy. The Southern Neighbourhood is now US-light, the country is somewhat involved but in much less than it used to be. Conflict management and ways of peace making is what Europe needs to develop for the neighbourhood.

The Turkey deal has changed Europe's position regarding the region again, political actors have a vested interest in keeping Turkey on track. Europe has to find a way to deal with the rivalry of two pre-eminent players in the region. We are engaged in several ways but should not be choosing sides, need to interact with trio as players as a trio.

In the Middle East, Europe needs a fundamental change that relates to our own community, disaster in Europe shows how Europe needs to engage with Muslim neighbourhood. This is a long range project, need deep political and economic change. We should realise that European values are still attractive to the people in the Middle East. Lack of appetite and willingness in EU also means we are not now really talking about military intervention, in many cases - need to have that in perspective.

We also need specificity for different regions. For example, what do we want from Egypt: not democracy but stability? Countries without a colonial past could be more effective in the Middle East, since there are less negative connotations.

Since we are not tough on Turkey, a question emerges over whether EU foreign policy is capable of working on democracy and human rights beyond Europe. At this point, the most valuable thing we can offer Erdogan is to be complicit in his domestic plans. However much we need EU Turkey co-operation on refugee crisis and other issues, blind endorsement of what he is doing at home would not be a smart strategy. We should make clear where we have interests and where we have values; we will of course trade and work with other countries but we don't have to say that they are a democracy if they are not.

#### Humanitarian civilian intervention force

One proposal in ECFR's paper on a new deal for burden sharing (see below) is to set up humanitarian civilian intervention force. It is crucial for the normative integrity of the EU that it sends a message that it is taking ownership regarding the humanitarian needs of people, even if we can't intervene militarily. There is a need to understand a lot more about interplay between security and development. The policy proposal of a humanitarian task force is not only for the sake of promoting humanitarian values, the fact that people are suffering is a strategic challenge.

There is a risk of undermining the UNHCR, which is already seen as European. UNHCR is a European idea, but a weak idea. It is a systematically underfunded organisation that needs to seek pledges when a crisis comes. Instead of going in after the fact, we need to create a standing organisation, with a budget of 5 to 10 percent of EU budget. At the moment, an obvious deterioration of a situation doesn't cause any reaction until people start to move. Things like Palestinian camps where people live for decades is not going to happen anymore, people are not that patient anymore.

A problem to keep in mind on the EU label on humanitarian intervention is that countries prefer to give either through big organisations or under their own name, since they have to present any measures and investment to their national parliaments.

#### SESSION 2 The building blocks: a new policy framework

In recent weeks, ECFR has published two policy briefs with new proposals on asylum reform.

[“Bear any Burden: How EU governments can manage the refugee crisis”](#) by Josef Janning and Susi Dennison, recommends that the EU move away from an approach to solidarity based solely on relocation numbers, to one that recognises other contributions that states can make. These contributions range from financial support and human resources for reception, accommodation and integration as part of an intergovernmental taskforce, with a first role in stabilising the situation in Greece, to external border management. Such an agreement will allow all states to demonstrably

contribute within their means and the realities of domestic politics. It would also provide for the better integration of a foreign policy dimension.

In [“Paying the price: the cost of Europe’s refugee crisis”](#), Sebastian Dullien explores the economics behind the refugee crisis and makes the case for a more formal European Refugee Union to coordinate the EU’s response. The paper calls for the separation of the financial costs of paying for the refugee crisis from the reception and hosting of refugees, drawing on the fact that some member states would be able to contribute fiscally but are reluctant to host refugees, and vice versa. He also notes that, should the costs of hosting refugees be shared more evenly across the European Union, the local economic and infrastructural benefits of providing facilities for refugees could prove a boon to the struggling economies of some southern European countries. Such a Refugee Union would allow for the centralisation of asylum processing, giving greater flexibility to distribute refugees to fit the political and economic circumstances. Greater coordination would also benefit the foreign policy dimension of the refugee crisis: providing more influence within international diplomacy, supporting the provision of refugee hosting in the region, and allowing for a co-operative approach to external border management.

#### *Discussion:*

##### Recent European Commission proposal for asylum reform

The Commission proposal for asylum reform is problematic: the non-voluntary nature of the ‘fine’ for not taking in refugees does little to acknowledge existing political divisions. The damage of enforcing the relocation scheme earlier is quite large, actions like these do nothing to bring the member states that are not in the central picture now more into the collective. We have seen high stakes in getting this issue, cross domestic and foreign policy, under control. The EU reaction is very traditional: solutions proposed involve more institutions and more power for Brussels. But it is not working, we do not know how to move refugees around in Europe. One cannot tell refugees where to go. By keeping Dublin and adding relocation, the Commission has combined two ideas that were not working.

Regarding the emergency nature of the situation, it is not true that millions of people are waiting to come to Europe, this is a myth perpetuated firstly by the far right. The problem Europe is facing now is a very specific one, not pointing to a trend. From 2009-2013, average number of people that crossed was always around 100,000.

##### The situation in Greece and the Turkey deal

Greece has promise to keep up refugee law, but not a single asylum case has been concluded since the Turkey deal. Germany and Sweden have offered to send case workers, but they were told nobody is needed. The Greeks have very few case workers, since they didn’t have an asylum service until 2011. Many of the caseworkers do not agree with the Turkey deal, as they don’t think Turkey is safe for anyone, and they do not want to do the EU’s dirty work. Right now, there is no European spokesperson on the island to defend the proposal. If the EU would be there with an integrated mission, it would provide cover for the Greeks. A new policy proposal by Gerald Knaus is to have European Union asylum support missions, similar to the Task Forces suggested by ECFR’s paper.

On the Turkish side visa liberalisation should be tied to total transparency with what happens to the people we send back. If we do these simple things, we preserve our ability to deal with refugees, and step out of toxic debate of sending people around Europe against their will.

Some argued that the human rights movements have done damage when it comes to the Turkey deal. Human rights watch, Amnesty International and the European Council on Refugees and Exiles

wrote a paper saying the new deal is the end of refugee convention, this type of discourse can be seen as extremist. The NGOs don't realise that the alternative to working with the deal would be worse.

### The Visegrad countries

The Visegrad countries have been very influential in the migration debate. The countries have both real problems and perception problems, and a narrative that is divisive within Europe. There are actually refugees in Czech Republic: from countries like Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, Cuba. Countries who were not used to refugees had to get used to it, within last the years, the number of foreigners living in the country came from several thousands to several hundreds of thousands. During the refugee crisis in the '90s from former Yugoslavia, the Visegrad countries managed, because there was a perception was that they knew the people who were coming into the country. At the beginning of the current refugee crisis, there was no reality to see on the ground in these countries, no refugees from Syria yet, but politicians used TV images for narratives.

The problem with quotas for relocation was the obligatory nature. Czech Republic and most other Visegrad countries never had a problem with resettlement, and offered it voluntarily because it is a good counter-smuggling initiative. Previously, the Visegrad Four did not have the same ideas, but because of the quota they felt more unified, and decided to cooperate.

### Libya and the Mediterranean

On the central Mediterranean angle, big numbers are thrown around, but the threat around Libya is inflated. The idea of large amounts of refugee coming towards Europe through partner countries of the EU can also create the wrong incentive structure, a lot of politicians are ready to be the new Erdogan. The risk is not uncontrolled migration, but situation that is out of control with numbers that are not that high. Striking how we have numbers that we could manage.

Italy's solution for the influx of migrants is now to do pushbacks, wave people through to other countries, or what they have already started to do, ask refugees if they are willing to work, and put them in the economic migrant's queue if they say yes. There, they get a deportation order and become informal migrants. There is a need to show that there is a European system, instead of having Italy and Greece have completely different systems.

The kind of problems discussed that are not classic foreign policy issues, but we will to develop foreign policy strategies and policies for it.

### The next meetings of the foreign policy strategy group

- October/ November: memo from Europe to the next US president
- First half of December: strategic outlook 2017 and foresight exercise