

The European Union's Global Strategy:

putting sustainable development at the heart of EU external action

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The challenge

The drafting of the European Union (EU) Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy is a unique opportunity for the EU to reposition itself as a global leader and to foster greater unity and joined-up approaches in its external action. Yet, the ongoing consultation is showing how difficult it will be to align actors in Brussels and in Member States behind a strategy that guides not only the EU's security policy, but also wider EU foreign policy and external action, including trade, development, democracy and human rights, humanitarian aid, and climate action.

Two challenges stand out:

1. In the current political environment, the global strategy process will have to carefully balance considerations of security threats (especially in Europe's neighbourhood) with global sustainable development challenges and opportunities. Europe needs a holistic view of peace and sustainable development beyond short-term interventionism, taking the underlying and deeper-

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seated problems rooted in poverty, inequality, oppression, and environmental degradation into consideration.

2. Political problems can no longer be classified as either external or internal, which poses substantial challenges for EU institutions and policy-making. Individual policies cannot address global threats (such as terrorism, armed conflicts, communicable diseases or climate change) and opportunities (such as better-integrated markets, good health and well-being, decent jobs and economic growth). They require joined-up responses across a range of external and internal policies. Path dependency across the EU, however, tends to keep areas of external (and internal) action apart, avoiding joint competencies and responsibilities. Institutional barriers and short-sighted policy-making undermine efforts towards improved coherence and collective action.

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed in New York in September 2015, provide a global framework for addressing these two challenges. The SDGs dissolve the artificial boundary between

internal and external action. As signatories, the EU and Member States are required to develop a new quality of inter-departmental and whole-of-government approaches that encompass all dimensions of EU external (and internal) policy.

Linking the Global Strategy to the 2030 Agenda is therefore a strategic opportunity to enable coherent policy-making and to reduce the frictions and trade-offs between single policy fields. However, to date, the SDGs have only featured marginally in discussions on the Global Strategy, and references have mainly been limited to development policy.

This neglects the fact that in addition to putting the world on a more sustainable path, progress on the 17 SDGs will further benefit the EU's own interests by promoting success in foreign and security policy and many domestic policies.

The solution

The EU Global Strategy should encompass all areas of EU external action.

The EU Global Strategy should be an umbrella document for all EU external action, including related strategy processes such as the trade review, the neighbourhood review and a likely review of the European Consensus on Development.

As such, it needs to define the interests and objectives of foreign policy beyond a narrow security mandate and reflect global interdependencies and crises from a long-term perspective. In addition to specific goals addressing the security and well-being of European citizens, the strategy should also aim for global sustainable development, poverty reduction, the promotion of human rights and democracy, and inclusive trade and finance regimes.

The EU's leaders have to acknowledge and communicate that sustainable global development (and sustainable development in the EU) is the condition for security, stability, social justice and democracy – abroad as much as at home.

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The Global Strategy must refer to all policy fields dealing with global interdependencies. It should set out a new EU foreign policy that aims for sustainable solutions to global challenges. This does not imply a subordination of these policy areas to foreign policy. Individual policy areas will still formulate their own priorities

and determine how they want to make specific contributions to the priorities defined in the Global Strategy.

However, what an overarching strategy can deliver – as opposed to individual strategies (e.g. the European Consensus on Development) – is a push for greater coherence and a commitment to collective action.

The Global Strategy and the SDG implementation process need to go hand-in-hand.

The transformative ambition of the 2030 Agenda requires collective action and whole-of-government approaches from the EU, as well as an implementation strategy that coordinates domestic and external policies at national and EU institutional levels.

Individual policy fields or institutions will be unable to promote the SDGs, regardless of whether they relate to social development, environment, climate, governance or peace and security.

The global (and European) institutional architecture and modes of working hail from the pre-2015 world and were not designed for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Maintaining the same working structure entails two risks:

- the political momentum for the implementation of the Agenda may abate quickly; or
- the implementation of this comprehensive and ambitious agenda will mainly be driven by environment and development policy actors, without a coherent overarching framework that engages all relevant external and internal EU policies.

The EU played an important role in negotiating the 2030 Agenda. However, Europe will now also have to lead by example if it expects to enter transformative partnerships

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or want others to act on issues such as sustainable consumption and production, or efficient use of energy and renewable energy sources.

Commitment and guidance from the highest level is crucial to assure all EU institutions and Member States prioritise the Agenda during policy-making, as well as to align various interests and institutions behind the Agenda. Linking the Global Strategy (as an overarching policy) to the SDGs is thus a strategic opportunity to foster greater coherence across all EU external action.

Making it happen

The likely adoption of the EU Global Strategy by the European Council in June should be combined with a joint European statement promoting the 2030 Agenda.

EU heads of state and government, as well as EU Vice-Presidents Timmermans and Mogherini, attended the summit in New York in September 2015 and confirmed the Agenda's relevance for Member States and EU institutions.

What has been lacking is a joint European endorsement of the 2030 Agenda and an announcement of a concrete course of action on how the EU intends to implement the SDGs – within and outside of Europe. We therefore call on EU heads of state and government and the leaders of EU institutions (the presidents of the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament) to issue

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This endorsement should also commit all Member States to devise national SDG implementation strategies, and to link action with national budget lines and with European funding instruments

where they exist.

The commitment by EU heads of state and government to implement the 2030 Agenda domestically and externally should be in place or announced before the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development in July 2016.

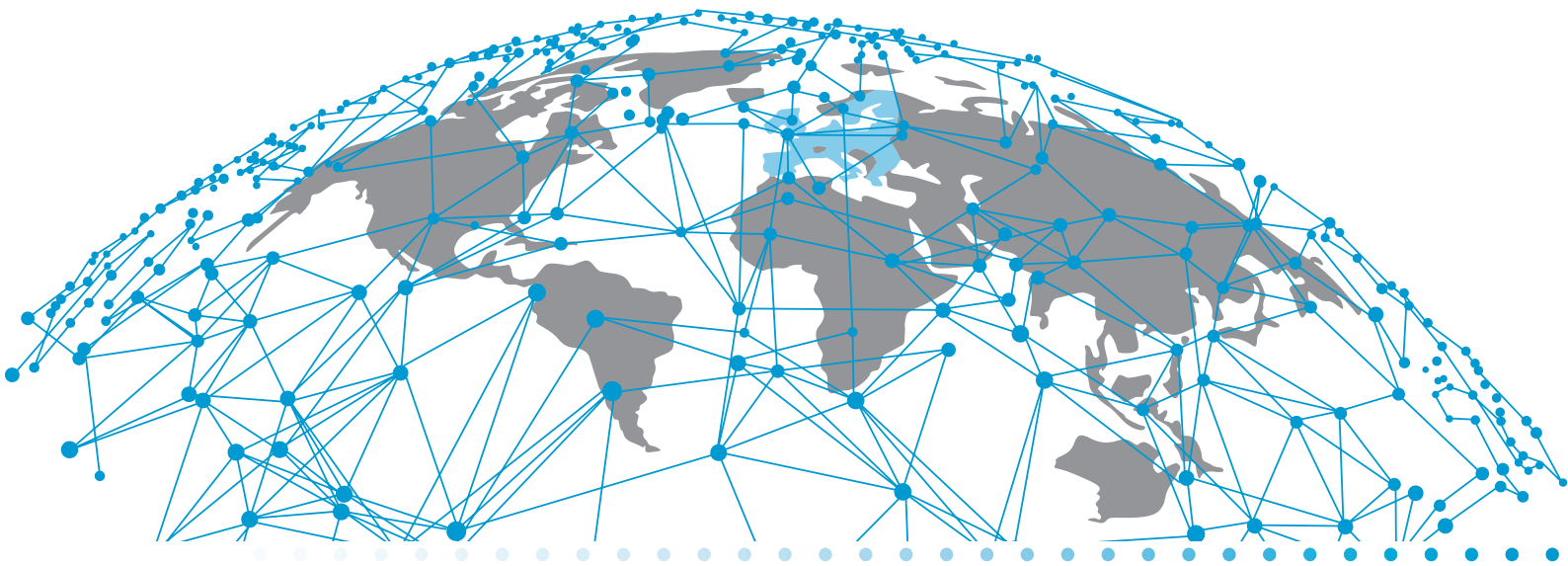
At the EU level, the leadership for the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda should be assigned to the Vice-Presidents, rather than assigning it to individual Directorates-General.

Vice-President Frans Timmermans is already responsible for the review of Europe's internal ambitions and the review of Europe 2020, while the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HR/VP), Federica Mogherini, is responsible for the review of Europe's external ambitions and the drafting of the Global Strategy. The HR/VPs mandate to coordinate all EU external action is an institutional asset that should be deployed fully.

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