

EU foreign and defence policy must be effective

Written by David McAllister on 23 October 2019 in Opinion
Opinion

With new political powers emerging around the world, it is more important than ever that the EU reinforces its role as a global leader, writes David McAllister.



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There is no doubt that multilateralism is under greater threat than ever before, as a growing divergence of views on key issues between the EU and certain international powers.

As a consequence, we are already seeing existing universal rules and values either being called into question or taken advantage of, while at the same time new political forces try to realise their own global and regional ambitions.

The full scale of strategic implications and geopolitical consequences of these developments remain hard to predict.

These challenges should present an opportunity for the EU to position itself as a global leader.

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Delivering effective and sustainable global governance is one of the five priorities of the EU's Global Strategy, launched in June 2016.

It is focused on security, defence and on building closer links between external and internal policies, such as migration, the environment and energy. The European Parliament, alongside other EU institutions, fully supports multilateralism.

To achieve this, the AFET Committee is working in close cooperation with the European External Action Service.

One example is that each year, the AFET Committee prepares Parliament recommendations to the VP/HR ahead of the Council's adoption of EU priorities for the respective United Nations General Assembly session.

These cover strategic topics of common interest, such as peace and security, the fight against terrorism, migration, human rights, development and climate change.

For many years, the European Parliament has played a prominent role in parliamentary diplomacy, including in mediation, conflict prevention and dialogue processes.

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We have to pursue a self-assured common foreign policy. Since the adoption of the Lisbon Treaty, Parliament, through the AFET Committee, has been a fully-fledged co-legislator on the EU's external financing instruments.

It also plays an increasing role in their oversight and scrutiny; the new term will be decisive for Parliament to reinforce this role.

Following the European Commission's proposal for a Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), a new set of instruments for foreign affairs will determine how EU assistance to third countries will be shaped, with almost €90bn to be spent in 2021-2027.

This will become the EU's main tool for fostering cooperation with third countries and for implementing its international commitments.

During the interinstitutional negotiations, Parliament will defend its position on the proposed Instrument for Pre- Accession Assistance (IPA III) for 2021-2027.

The IPA is unique, supporting candidate and potential candidate countries in reforming their political, economic and legal systems to prepare them for the rights and obligations of EU membership.

In general, I support the Commission's intention to enhance the effectiveness, coherence and flexibility of external action funding.

At the same time, there must be enhanced democratic accountability and parliamentary control.

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A rapidly-changing geostrategic order with new emerging powers, armed conflicts on the EU's doorstep, the rise in hybrid warfare, cyber-attacks against our strategic infrastructure and increasingly blurred boundaries between internal and external security contribute to making security one of the top priorities of the EU political agenda.

The borderless nature of security threats, the current fragmentation of defence markets, the lack of interoperability and poor cost-effectiveness are some of the key elements pushing Europe towards a more efficient use of resources and greater coordination of national security and defence efforts.

Following adoption of the Implementation Plan on Security and Defence in November 2016, there were a series of new initiatives launched to enable Member States to undertake defence research, enhance defence coordination, increase investment in defence and develop joint defence capabilities.

These include the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), an inclusive instrument enabling interested Member States to strengthen their defence cooperation in specific areas, the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD), a process aimed at obtaining a better overview of Member States' defence-related activities and spending, and the European Defence Fund (EDF), intended to boost the performance of European capabilities through innovation in projects for the collaborative development of defence products and technologies.

These need to be strengthened in future. Transatlantic relations, the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership as well as China, Russia, the Middle East and our relations with Africa will all be priorities for the new term.

With the newly-elected European Parliament, the confirmation of the new Commission and Josep Borrell taking over the position of the VP/HR, a new chapter for the EU is unfolding.

Let us all work closely together to make our European foreign policy more effective and coherent, protecting multilateralism and positioning the EU as a global leader.

About the author

David McAllister (DE, EPP) is chair of AFET, the European Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee

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