



# A global actor in search of a strategy

*European Union foreign policy  
between multilateralism  
and bilateralism*



*Research and  
Innovation*

**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation  
Directorate B — Innovation Union and European Research Area  
Unit B.6. — Reflective Societies

Contact: Simon Schunz

European Commission  
1049 Bruxelles/Brussel  
BELGIQUE/BELGIË

E-mail: [simon.schunz@ec.europa.eu](mailto:simon.schunz@ec.europa.eu)

# A global actor in search of a strategy

*European Union foreign policy  
between multilateralism and  
bilateralism*

*Europe Direct is a service to help you find answers  
to your questions about the European Union.*

**Freephone number (\*):**

**00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11**

(\*) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators,  
phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014

ISBN 978-92-79-36550-8

doi:10.2777/7107

© European Union, 2014

Reproduction is authorised provided the source is acknowledged.

Images copyright © Éva Széll, 2014

*Printed in France*

Printed on elemental chlorine-free bleached paper (ECF)

# Contents

<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Executive summary</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>2. The conceptual ground: global affairs and the EU</b> .....	<b>15</b>
2.1. The evolving global order: multipolarity, interolarity and global governance .....	16
2.2. Europe as a global actor: what is European Union foreign policy? .....	20
2.3. The legal-institutional framework of EU foreign policy: set-up and tools .....	22
<b>3. The European Union as a global actor — key themes</b> .....	<b>27</b>
3.1. The EU as a multilateral player .....	28
3.1.1. Foundations and capacities .....	28
3.1.2. Activities and outcomes .....	30
3.2. The EU as a bilateral actor .....	36
3.2.1. Foundations and capacities .....	36
3.2.2. Activities and outcomes .....	38
3.3. Situating the EU in the contemporary global order .....	45
3.3.1. The contingency of the EU's significance as a global actor .....	45
3.3.2. How others see the EU as a global actor .....	46
<b>4. Policy implications: the EU's future as a global actor</b> .....	<b>51</b>
4.1. Key policy-relevant insights: the EU's eclectic foreign policy .....	52
4.2. Scenarios for the future: Europe's role in the world in 2030 .....	53
4.3. Policy recommendations: how the EU can be a durable part of global solutions .....	56
4.3.1. The need for an overarching strategic narrative .....	57
4.3.2. Foreign policymaking: adopting foreign policy positions to pursue the strategy ..	58
4.3.3. Foreign policy implementation: effective EU diplomacy .....	60
<b>5. Concluding remarks</b> .....	<b>63</b>
<b>Annex</b> .....	<b>65</b>

# Abbreviations

<b>ASEAN</b>	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
<b>BASIC</b>	Brazil, South Africa, India, China
<b>BRIC</b>	Brazil, Russia, India, China
<b>CARICOM</b>	Caribbean Community and Common Market
<b>CELAC</b>	Community of Latin American and Caribbean States
<b>CFSP</b>	common foreign and security policy
<b>CSDP</b>	common security and defence policy
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EEC</b>	European Economic Community
<b>EPC</b>	European Political Cooperation
<b>ESS</b>	European Security Strategy
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation (UN)
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>GMO</b>	genetically modified organism
<b>HR</b>	High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
<b>IGO</b>	inter-governmental organisation
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organisation
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund (UN)
<b>Mercosur</b>	Southern Cone Common Market (Common Market of the South)
<b>MNC</b>	multinational company
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organisation
<b>PTA</b>	preferential trade agreement
<b>SSH</b>	Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities
<b>TEU</b>	Treaty on European Union
<b>TFEU</b>	Treaty on the Functioning of the EU
<b>T-TIP</b>	Transatlantic Trade and Investment Agreement
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>Unesco</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>UNGA</b>	United Nations General Assembly
<b>Unicef</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation

# Foreword

The year 2014 marks, in many respects, a transitional year for the European Union. A new European Parliament is elected, a new College of the European Commission will take office, and some of the key figures of EU politics will be renewed. Besides the posts of European Commission and European Council presidents, the position of the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will have to be newly filled. The successor to Catherine Ashton will be the face of the European Union's foreign policy for years to come, with an important potential to provide further impetus to the Union's external activities. For the EU's research and innovation policy, 2014 is equally a year of important transitions. Coinciding with the multi-annual financial framework for the period 2014 to 2020, the new framework programme for research, Horizon 2020, kicks off with a first series of work programmes.

Therefore, 2014 is also a good moment to engage in stock-taking of the achievements of past years, while turning toward the future. The present Policy Review strives to achieve precisely this with regard to EU foreign policy. It discusses the advances in European Union bilateral and multilateral activities *beyond* the Union's immediate neighbourhood, while highlighting the remaining challenges that the EU faces when engaging on the global scene. To discuss the EU's role as a global actor, it draws on the key findings of eight major research projects conducted in the area of social sciences and humanities and financed under the sixth and seventh framework programmes for research. Based on this discussion, this Review advances a set of policy implications on the strategic outlook, contents and conduct of the EU's foreign policy for the medium-term future. In the face of ongoing transformations of the global system, it is argued that the EU needs to seize the opportunities provided by the year 2014 and develop a comprehensive strategic narrative. This narrative should clearly articulate what the Union wants to achieve, with whom as well as how when it enters the global scene. It should be based on both internal and external considerations and must provide the necessary guidance while remaining flexible enough to allow the EU to adapt to changing contexts. Turning the EU into a strategic foreign policy actor essentially demands an increased willingness of its Member States to invest political capital in a genuine European foreign policy.

The findings of this Review and its policy advice speak not only to policymakers in domains in which the EU is externally active, but also to the large community of stakeholders interested in EU foreign policy in the wider sense of the term. Since providing sound evidence bases for policymaking implies revealing one's scientific sources, this Review contains a host of references, many of them to the projects' original research and publications.

This Review was authored by Simon Schunz (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Unit B6 'Reflective Societies'). Philippe Keraudren and Keji Adunmo provided important inputs, while Catherine Lemaire lent assistance (all European Commission,

Directorate-General for Research and Innovation, Unit B6 'Reflective Societies'). Further constructive comments were provided by colleagues from the European External Action Service, Karen Smith (London School of Economics and Political Science) and Louise Van Schaik (Clingendael-Netherlands Institute of International Relations). Their input is gratefully acknowledged.

The content and views set out in this Review are the responsibility of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the European Union, its institutions and bodies.

# Executive summary

- **Uncertainty about the evolving world order is a major structuring feature of global politics nowadays.** The transformations that the global system is undergoing demand adaptive capacities of all foreign policy players, including the EU.
- **If the EU's adaptive capacities are thus put to the test, its record is decidedly mixed.** As a multilateral player, it is generally perceived as a positive, but often ineffective, global actor. In its bilateral relations, the EU is perceived to regularly lack coherence, targeting actors in highly divergent ways. While tailor-made strategies can be an advantage, there seems to be no overarching 'grand strategy' that guides EU bilateralism and integrates it into the Union's multilateral efforts. **Taken together, its multilateral and bilateral approaches add up to a rather eclectic foreign policy mix.**
- As a consequence, **the EU's place in the evolving global system, as well as its own understanding of what this place should be, is in flux.** This is also how the EU's situation is perceived by external actors. They often view it as possessing high potential in economic terms and as an active multilateral diplomat, but as weak, devoid of a strategy and without real impact in some crucial domains, notably security.
- Given both the global state of uncertainty and the EU's current record, **it is imperative that the Union develops a clear strategic narrative for the future, if it still wants to play a major role in global affairs.** Such a narrative should transcend the notion of a 'security strategy' and cover the whole array of closely intertwined EU foreign policy matters, including trade. It needs to sketch out a **credible European vision of global governance for the 21st century, which clearly articulates what the EU wants to achieve, with whom as well as how,** both for its own benefit and that of the planet.
- **The Union's narrative should be based on both internal and external considerations and developed in a forward-looking manner.** On the one hand, it needs to rest on objectives that reflect the Union's interests, values and goals in a coherent manner. On the other hand, it needs to base itself on comprehensive analysis of the evolving global order.
- Whereas its narrative must provide the necessary guidance, **the fluctuating global order requires the EU to opt for a 'liquid strategy' which relies on general principles and values but remains flexible enough to be adapted to the fluid contexts the EU faces.**
- To adopt such a liquid strategy, the Union needs to empower itself to become more malleable in its day-to-day operations. **In its everyday decision-making, the EU needs to opt for more flexible procedures, involving fewer players and leading to faster results.**

- As a general rule of thumb, and taking account of the legal framework, **the European External Action Service should be the EU's central organ for foreign policy formulation, coordination and implementation.**
- **Moreover, the EU needs to have a clear understanding of its own resources and the instruments at its disposal.** The choice of the right instrument also goes hand in hand with the **selection of suitable coalition partners and 'targets' of its foreign policy.**
- Turning the EU into a strategic foreign policy actor demands essentially the **willingness of its Member States to invest political capital into genuine EU foreign policy.** The 2014 appointments for the EU's top positions, including the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, will provide the next big opportunity for Member States to demonstrate their support for a strong EU foreign policy.

# 1. Introduction



*“Europe’s role in the world is one of the major challenges of the 21st century.”*

*(EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Catherine Ashton, July 2013)*

*“In spite of changes in the international landscape, China has always supported  
(...) a bigger role in international affairs by a united, stable and prosperous EU.”*

*(President of the People’s Republic of China  
Xi Jinping, April 2014)*

The European Union (EU) remains a relatively **recent player on the global stage**. Despite external activities that date back to times when the European Economic Community (EEC) first entered the global scene, the year 1993 and the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty represented arguably *the* major milestone for its ascent to a foreign policy actor in its own right <sup>(1)</sup>. In the 20 years since then, many parameters of the EU’s external policies have changed. On the one hand, the **global context in which the EU operates has undergone significant transformations**. Where the immediate post-Cold War period had sparked optimism about a more balanced world order in which the EU could play a major part, the globe finds itself today in an extended phase of uncertainty about its key structuring principles. Emerging power centres on all continents, but also many transnational actors (e.g. global financial markets, transnational terrorist groups) challenge the role of traditionally strong foreign policy players such as the United States, Russia, Japan or major EU Member States. On the other hand, and in parallel to these global evolutions, the **foreign policy portfolio of the European Union has ever more expanded**, various strategies (e.g. the 2003 European Security Strategy and its 2008 update) have been designed, and its activities have become more widespread. Moreover, with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has made an attempt to solidify the institutional underpinnings of its foreign policy by creating a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) who is served by the European External Action Service (EEAS). As a result, the Union is nowadays competent and quite active in a vast array of fields, supplementing or, at times, replacing the foreign policies of its Member States.

The European Union’s coming-of-age as a foreign policy actor has been accompanied by many controversies, not only among politicians and diplomats, but also in academia. Where earlier debates had concentrated on understanding the EU’s ‘presence’ and ‘actorness’ in global affairs (Can the EU be a foreign policy actor in its own right? In what way is this actor distinct from the Member States?) <sup>(2)</sup>, later research tended to focus on its capacity *as* an actor, with authors attempting to pinpoint what type of global player the Union really was. Concepts such as ‘civilian power’ or ‘normative power’ have been prominent in these debates, but the EU has also been attributed

<sup>(1)</sup> This is not to discard the important efforts undertaken through European Political Cooperation (EPC) between the 1970s and the 1990s. For an overview of the historical evolution of the EU as a foreign policy actor, see Keukeleire, S., and Delreux, T., *The Foreign Policy of the European Union*, Second edition, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014, Chapter 2.

<sup>(2)</sup> Allen, D., and Smith, M., ‘Western Europe’s presence in the contemporary international arena’, *Review of International Studies*, 1990, 16(1): 19–37; Sjøstedt, G., *The External Role of the European Community*, Saxon House, Farnborough, 1977.

other roles: those of a ‘model’ of regional integration or a ‘leader’ in certain issue areas <sup>(3)</sup>. These debates parted from the assumption that the EU had to be perceived as an actor *à part entière* on the global scene and that this actor, given its history and by virtue of its own character as an economic giant, had something specific to contribute to the governance of global affairs. For one, as a non-traditional (read: non-state) foreign policy actor and multilateral entity, the EU apparently possessed the capacities to forge consensual solutions at a global level by exporting its own example. Article 21(1) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) embodies this (self-)understanding by summing up the core objectives, principles and underlying values of EU foreign policy: **‘The Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by the principles which have inspired its own creation, development and enlargement, and which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law.’** What is more, given the Union’s comparatively more limited own military capacities, many observers saw in its reliance on norms, values and the power of example — rather than ‘hard’ power — a major distinctive trademark. The trend to invent ever new labels for the EU was, and is, accompanied by studies examining various policy fields to assess whether the Union really qualifies as ‘normative power’, ‘leader’ or self-declared champion of certain values. In the face of mixed policy outcomes, however, the different images of what the EU supposedly stands for as a foreign policy player have remained contested. In more recent times, attention seems to therefore have shifted once again. Criticising earlier debates for their high degree of EU centrism, the **most recent research aims at a better understanding of the external context the EU operates in, and of the ways in which the EU can best fit into this environment** <sup>(4)</sup>. In this context, scholars have also resorted to **questioning the normative drive of EU foreign policy activities** (i.e. its desire to export its model), **and highlighted the tendency toward (and need for) more strategic action** on the part of its foreign policy decision-makers <sup>(5)</sup>. As in previous periods, this debate accompanies an empirical trend, namely the EU’s conscious choice for increasing the number of albeit loosely defined ‘strategic partnerships’ with key countries and regions in the world.

In this context, at a time where global politics are changing, and where the EU’s role in the world is being re-discussed both in substance and in its institutional manifestations, **this Policy Review takes stock of the debates about its stance as a global actor and extracts their key policy-relevant implications**. This is done by **drawing on the insights of recent research conducted by projects that were financed under the EU’s sixth and seventh framework programmes for research** (FP6, 2002–06 and FP7, 2007–13). Under FP7, a specific activity was dedicated to issues related to ‘Europe in the World’ within the Socio-Economic Sciences and

<sup>(3)</sup> Duchêne, F., ‘Europe’s role in world peace’, in Mayne, R. (ed.), *Europe Tomorrow: sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, Collins, London, 1972, 32–47; Manners, I., ‘Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms?’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2002, 40(2): 235–258; Börzel, T., and Risse, T., *The EU as a Model of Regional Integration*, Free University, Berlin, 2009; Zito, A., ‘The European Union as an environmental leader in a global environment’, *Globalizations*, 2005, 2(3): 363–75.

<sup>(4)</sup> MERCURY, EU-GRASP and EU4SEAS, *The EU and Multilateralism: Nine Recommendations*, EU-GRASP Policy Brief, 2011.

<sup>(5)</sup> Strategy is not (only) understood in military terms here, but touches on the EU’s entire set of external activities: Bishop, S., *The Value of Power, the Power of Values: A Call for an EU Grand Strategy*, Academia Press, Gent, 2009.

Humanities (SSH) programme. With its emphasis on ‘Europe’s role as a global actor’ as part of pillar one of Societal Challenge 6 (‘Europe in a Changing World — Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies’), the Specific Programme for Horizon 2020 stipulates further research in this domain for the period 2014–20.

Concretely, this Policy Review serves three main purposes. *First*, by synthesising and scrutinising findings of significant EU-wide collaborative research projects, it asks what has been learned on the EU’s role as a global actor over the past decade, challenging some previously held conceptions of the EU. *Second*, by combining various conceptual debates with the empirical findings on EU bi- and multilateral activities on major issue areas, this Review systematically sets findings into a broader context in search for cross-time and cross-issue patterns. Given the vast range of issues that EU foreign policy touches upon these days, the impressive amount of relations it maintains with countries, regional and international organisations all over the world, but also the wide variety of projects financed under FP6/7 over the past years <sup>(6)</sup>, this Review must limit itself to a set of key issues and projects. It **scrutinises the EU’s activities as a bi- and multilateral actor in central domains related to prosperity (global economic governance), livelihood (global environmental, notably climate governance) and security (global security governance), concentrating on relations with third parties beyond its neighbourhood**. Issues such as enlargement and neighbourhood policy (i.e. the EU as a **regional** actor), human rights and democracy or migration, as important as they are, will thus not fall within the scope of this Review <sup>(7)</sup>. This choice is largely in line with the focuses of the selected projects. The extraction of patterns facilitates fulfilling the *third* purpose then, which consists in **identifying the major policy-relevant implications of the research findings and in formulating policy recommendations on EU foreign policy**.

In short, this Review draws essentially on the insights of the following projects <sup>(8)</sup>.

- **ATLANTIC FUTURE:** *Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas* (FP7, 2013–15)

<sup>(6)</sup> An overview of these projects is available online ([http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/search\\_en.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/projects/search_en.cfm)).

<sup>(7)</sup> EU enlargement and neighbourhood policies are currently treated by several early-stage SSH projects financed under FP7, for example MAXCAP (Maximizing the integration capacity of the European Union: Lessons and prospects for enlargement and beyond, 2013–16), CASCADE (Exploring the Security-Democracy Nexus in the Caucasus, 2014–17) and ISSICEU (Intra- and Inter-Societal Sources of Instability in the Caucasus and EU Opportunities to Respond, 2014–17). The first work programme of Societal Challenge 6 for 2014/15 includes a series of topics on EU neighbourhood/enlargement policies, especially: INT-6-2015: Re-invigorating the partnership between the two shores of the Mediterranean; INT-8-2015: The European Union and the Eastern Partnership; INT-9-2015: The European Union, Turkey and its wider neighbourhood: challenges and opportunities; INT-10-2015: The European Union and integration challenges in the Balkans. Projects selected under these topics will presumably commence in late 2015.

<sup>(8)</sup> These projects were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (i) they display a substantial and also practical-political engagement with EU foreign policy; (ii) they have been running for a sufficient amount of time to have produced a critical mass of insights; and (iii) they have something to say about the set of topics indicated above. In practice, these projects were mostly selected from two sub-areas to Activity 4 ‘Europe in the world’: sub-areas 4.1 ‘Interactions and interdependencies between world regions and their implications’ and 4.3 ‘Europe’s changing role in the world’. Under FP7, numerous projects were also financed under sub-area 4.2 ‘Conflicts, peace and human rights’. These cannot be dealt with here.

- **CHINESEVIEWSOFEU:** *Disaggregating Chinese Perception of the EU and Implications for the EU's China Policy* (FP7, 2008–11)
- **EU-GRASP:** *Changing multilateralism: the EU as a global-regional actor in security and peace* (FP7, 2009–12)
- **EUROBROADMAP:** *European Union and the world seen from abroad* (FP7, 2009–12)
- **GARNET:** *Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: The Role of the EU* (FP6 Network of Excellence, 2005–10)
- **GR:EEEN:** *Global reordering: Evolution through European networks* (FP7, 2011–15)
- **MERCURY:** *Multilateralism and the new external relations of the European Union* (FP7, 2009–12)
- **TRANSWORLD:** *Redefining the transatlantic relationship and its role in shaping global governance* (FP7, 2012–15)

While these eight projects form the backbone of this Review, others are touched upon whenever this seems of interest. Throughout this Review, projects are referenced with their acronym. Publications emanating from projects are cited, with the project acronym added in brackets and in colour (e.g. Damro, 2012, [MERCURY]). An overview of the projects referenced in this Review is provided in the Annex. Besides publications from these projects, sources from the growing academic and think tank literature on EU foreign policy are equally referred to when relevant.

The Review proceeds as follows: this introduction precedes a section in which the conceptual grounds will be charted (Part 2). Explaining key concepts such as global governance and EU foreign policy is quintessential for understanding the external context and situating the EU in it. Part 3 will then venture into the details of the debates about Europe's role as a global actor. The Union's place in the current global system is problematised by examining it as a multilateral and bilateral player, before reflecting on how it is perceived by the outside, non-European world. Project findings will be widely used in this discussion. Part 4 draws on these insights to extract policy-relevant implications. It operates with three scenarios of potential future world orders, and identifies the EU's options for adapting to those. Based on these empirical insights, it is argued that **uncertainty about the emerging world order is today the main and seemingly persistent structuring feature of global politics, which puts the EU's adaptive capacities to the test**. And the Union's record is decidedly mixed: while it has maintained its long-standing commitment to multilateralism, many forms of multilateralism coexist. Together with its more recent turn toward bilateral strategies, this adds up to a rather **eclectic mix of foreign policy tools**. Given both the state of uncertainty of global politics and the EU's current record, **this Review argues that the Union requires a more comprehensive and compelling strategic narrative. Whereas this narrative should provide the necessary guidance to its foreign policy, the Union also needs to empower itself to become more flexible in its day-to-day operations. To adopt such a 'liquid strategy'** <sup>(9)</sup>, a number of adjustments related to its institutional

<sup>(9)</sup> The term 'liquid strategy' is adopted here in loose analogy to the notions of 'liquid modernity' (Bauman, 2000) and 'liquid democracy'. Liquid modernity refers to the idea that we are undergoing a constant transformation of what Bauman calls 'life-politics' paired to an absence of solid structures. Contemporary global affairs could equally be interpreted in this sense. Liquid democracy adheres to general principles of representative democracy, but operates with different forms of delegations. One could argue that it is, at the level of democracy, to liquid modernity what a liquid foreign policy strategy is to the changing global order: Bauman, Z., *Liquid Modernity*, Polity Press, London, 2000.

**set-up, but especially a more stringent use of foreign policy tools, are suggested. A major precondition for such adjustments is a stronger willingness of EU Member States to invest political capital into genuine EU foreign policy.** So far, this willingness has not always been apparent, undermining both credibility and effectiveness of EU foreign policy. This Review will close with concluding remarks reflecting on the opportunities for change in the Union's foreign policy (Part 5). It argues that the year 2014, with its turnover in key EU institutions and new appointments to high profile foreign policy-related positions, provides a unique chance for Member States to demonstrate stronger support for EU foreign policy.

## 2. The conceptual ground: global affairs and the EU



To sketch out the conceptual ground, the current global order will be problematised, before turning to EU foreign policy and its instruments.

## 2.1. The evolving global order: multipolarity, interolarity and global governance

Understanding the precise nature of current global affairs is a major preoccupation for policymakers and scholars alike. Since the end of the Cold War in 1989/91, and fuelled by processes of globalisation, the globe appears to be undergoing quasi-constant transformations.

In the immediate post-Cold War period, global affairs seemed to be characterised by an unprecedented dominance of the United States and its political and socioeconomic model, which led some analysts to claim that the ‘end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government’ had been attained <sup>(10)</sup>. Yet, in the decades that followed, and with the rise of an authoritarian, state-capitalist power like China, this interpretation was called into question. Moreover, in 2001, the vulnerability and contestation of the US model became very obvious with the 9/11 terrorist attacks. In parallel to this **horizontal challenge to the Western model**, globalisation made global politics appear as increasingly volatile. Understood as the ‘widening, deepening and speeding up of global interconnectedness’ and enabled essentially through advances in communication, information and transport technologies, globalisation involves a gradual transformation of social relations from territorially bound forms of organisation (the nation-state) to a ‘deterritorialisation’ of social life <sup>(11)</sup>. This comes with the emergence of new political spaces which are not attached to territories. It has also favoured the proliferation of **new (types of) actors in global affairs, who vertically challenge state dominance**. Among them are inter-/non-governmental organisations (IGOs, (I)NGOs), religious movements, multinational companies (MNCs) or media and their respective networks <sup>(12)</sup>.

How the observations of an emergence of new global powers, increased deterritorialisation and proliferation of non-state actors and networks are interpreted, and which weight is given to each of them, depends on whether one perceives global affairs as predominantly state-driven or based on societal actors.

The perspective that emphasises the role of nation-states is most closely associated with the theoretical strand of neorealism and its particular notion of power. According to this theory, the international system is anarchic and dominated by competition between sovereign, formally equal states, whose behaviour essentially depends on their relative power. This power in turn relies on material resources (size of economy, military capacities, access to raw materials etc.). This view

<sup>(10)</sup> Fukuyama, F., ‘The End of History?’, *The National Interest*, 1989.

<sup>(11)</sup> Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D., and Perraton, J. (eds.), *Global Transformations — Politics, Economics and Culture*, Cambridge: Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, 14.

<sup>(12)</sup> Scholte, J., *Globalization — a Critical Introduction*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2005.

has strongly informed the present debate. Where the Cold War ‘balance of power’ between the United States and the Soviet Union has been interpreted as a rather stable equilibrium, the ‘unipolar moment’<sup>(13)</sup> of the early 1990s and the supposed **multipolarity resulting from the ascent of other major players such as China, India, Brazil or South Africa** are perceived as possible sources of increased tensions. These ‘emerging economies’ — and one could also cite other members of the G20 (e.g. Indonesia, Mexico, South Korea) — look back on longer periods of economic growth, have an impressive demographic weight, are ‘self-confident, self-aware, organised, and are investing in traditional military power’<sup>(14)</sup>. All this makes them potentially more inclined to challenge US dominance. Whether the EU counts as one of the poles is an open question<sup>(15)</sup>.

**The multipolarity thesis has been popular for a number of years, but it is also contested.** Critics estimate that this perspective on current global affairs pays too much attention to material power and state competition, and neglects prospects for cooperation between states. Giovanni Grevi in particular has pointed to the importance of interdependence in today’s globalised world. For him, it is not multipolarity per se, but a combination between multiple poles and interdependence that characterises the emerging global system: ‘**multipolarity in the age of interdependence** (...) captures the shifting balance of power and the ensuing geopolitical tensions while highlighting the fact that the prosperity and security of all the major powers are connected as never before’<sup>(16)</sup>. Yet, also this notion of ‘**interpolarity**’ remains essentially statist, and has been challenged for precisely this reason.

**For those who adhere to more society-based accounts of global affairs, the current global system can conceptually be regarded as ‘non-polar’.** Instead of focusing primarily on the interrelations of states in current global affairs, other factors and actors are regarded as equally important when it comes to shaping the global system. Among them features **the rise of non-state actors and networks**. To integrate the role of these players into conceptual discussions, the notion of global governance was first introduced in the 1990s<sup>(17)</sup>. **Global governance** can, on the one hand, be considered as a political programme (i.e. an idea on how global affairs should be conducted). On the other hand, it serves as analytical concept providing a ‘narrative’ of world politics that captures transformations of global policymaking in recent decades<sup>(18)</sup>. Where *governance* describes a collective process of political steering without a single centre or organising principle, speaking of *global* governance stresses the vertical and horizontal dimensions of this policymaking<sup>(19)</sup>. Such governance stretches across levels (from the international to the local), and involves various types of actors (states, intergovernmental, non-governmental

<sup>(13)</sup> Krauthammer, C., ‘The Unipolar Moment — America and the World 1990/91’, *Foreign Affairs*, 1990/91, 70(1): 23–33.

<sup>(14)</sup> Van Hooft, P., *Multipolarity, Multilateralism, and Strategic Competition*, GR:EN and GEM-Doctoral Working Paper 6, 2012 [GR:EN].

<sup>(15)</sup> This is further discussed below. See also Smith, K., ‘Can the European Union be a pole in a multipolar world?’, *The International Spectator*, 2013, 48(2): 114–126.

<sup>(16)</sup> Grevi, G., *The interpolar world: a new scenario*, Occasional Paper No 79, EU Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2009, 27.

<sup>(17)</sup> Pattberg, P., *Global Governance: Reconstructing a Contested Social Science Concept*, GARNET Working Paper No 03/06, 2006 [GARNET].

<sup>(18)</sup> Barnett, M., and Sikkink, K., ‘From international relations to global society’, in Reus-Smit, C., and Snidal, D. (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, 62–68.

<sup>(19)</sup> Rosenau, J., and Czempel, E.-O. (eds.), *Governance without Government: Order and Change in World Politics*, Cambridge University Press, New York, NY, 1992.

players) in formal *and* informal processes. **The ultimate objective of global governance is the search for cooperative solutions to global problems** <sup>(20)</sup>. Although it is possible to identify these key features of global governance, in practice, it can take many different forms. For one, various policy fields such as global financial governance, environmental governance or health governance may function according to different rules, given the specificity of the policy issue being dealt with. What is more, however, global governance can take diverging organisational forms, depending on the degree of (in)formality, of involvement of public and private actors, etc. These can range from informal ad hoc groupings around single topics (e.g. Friends of Syria Group involving a few countries around a specific crisis situation) to looser institutionalisations as in the G8 and G20 system or various transnational networks (involving public and/or private actors, e.g. World City Network, al-Qaida) and to strongly institutionalised forms such as the bodies of the United Nations system. Recently, two significant trends of global governance have stood out.

- **The advent of the G20 system:** Where the G7/8 had for a long time been a key meeting place for the world's major economic powers, the 2007/08 financial crisis and its aftermath led to the ascent of a new body: the G20 or 'Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors'. It involves the 19 largest world economies and the EU (Table 1 presents an overview). In 2009, the G20 declared itself the '**premier forum for (...) international economic cooperation**' <sup>(21)</sup>. Since then, the body has held numerous meetings in the regular finance minister format, plus additional summits involving heads of state and tackling issues ranging from finance and economics to development and the environment. For numerous observers, the creation of the forum sparked hopes for an inclusive and effective global governance body, relying on the input of players representing 80 % of the world's population. Others, notably the smaller and poorer developing nations, but also non-governmental organisations, question the legitimacy of this body and express their preference for the United Nations as the sole legitimate forum of multilateral governance.

---

<sup>(20)</sup> 'The Commission on Global Governance', *Our Global Neighbourhood*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995.

<sup>(21)</sup> G20 *Leaders' Statement*, Pittsburgh, 25 September 2009, point 19.

**Table 1. The G20 — membership and key figures**

MEMBER	Population (2012)	Nom. GDP in million USD (2012)	Nom. GDP/capita in USD (2012)
Argentina	40 117 096	474 954	11 576
Australia	22 328 632	1 541 797	67 722
Brazil	201 032 714	2 395 968	12 078
Canada	34 088 000	1 819 081	52 231
China	1 339 724 852	8 227 037	6 075
<b>European Union</b>	501 259 840	16 414 483	32 708
<b>France</b>	65 447 374	2 608 699	41 140
<b>Germany</b>	81 757 600	3 400 579	41 512
India	1 210 193 422	1 824 832	1 491
Indonesia	237 556 363	878 198	3 592
<b>Italy</b>	60 325 805	2 014 079	33 115
Japan	127 390 000	5 963 969	46 735
Republic of Korea	50 004 441	1 155 872	23 112
Mexico	112 211 789	1 177 116	10 247
Russia	143 400 000	2 021 960	14 246
Saudi Arabia	27 123 977	727 307	25 084
South Africa	53 000 000	384 315	7 506
Turkey	72 561 312	794 468	10 609
<b>United Kingdom</b>	62 041 708	2 440 505	38 588
United States	316 173 000	15 684 750	49 922

Source: International Monetary Forum, *World Economic Outlook, 2013*.

- **The evolution of multilateralism** <sup>(22)</sup>: Not only with the rise of the G20 has multilateralism — as a specific variant of global governance — come ‘under challenge’ <sup>(23)</sup>. After World War II, the emergence of the United Nations system with its various institutions extending into an ever-growing number of issues areas was *the* answer to the identified global coordination needs. In this context, multilateralism was traditionally understood as an ‘institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalised principles of conduct’ <sup>(24)</sup>. It was thus clearly rules-based. Moreover, it was inclusive in involving multiple,

<sup>(22)</sup> This section draws on Lazarou, E., Edwards, G., Hill, C., and Smith, J., *The Evolving ‘Doctrine’ of Multilateralism in the 21st Century*, MERCURY E-paper No 3, 2010 [MERCURY]; Bouchard, C., and Peterson, J., *Conceptualising Multilateralism — Can We All Just Get Along?*, MERCURY E-paper No 1, 2011 [MERCURY].

<sup>(23)</sup> Both as an institutional form and as an analytical concept: Newman, E., Thakur, R., and Tirman, J. (eds.), *Multilateralism Under Challenge? Power, International Order, and Structural Change*, UN University, Tokyo, 2006; Telò, M., *State and Multilateralism: Past, Present and Future*, GR:EN Working Paper No 12, 2011 [GR:EN].

<sup>(24)</sup> Ruggie, J., ‘Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution’, in Ruggie, J. (ed.), *Multilateralism Matters*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, 3–36, 11.

formally equal (state) parties. Finally, it relied on voluntary cooperation around the notion of ‘diffuse reciprocity’, so the idea that all actors benefit from cooperation over the long run <sup>(25)</sup>. While these organising principles seem to retain their validity, multilateralism has transformed in no small measure in recent years. Luk van Langenhove (EU-GRASP) speaks of ‘**Multilateralism 2.0**’, which he sees as characterised by four features <sup>(26)</sup>: (i) **a greater diversification of multilateral organisations within and beyond the UN system**; (ii) **the growing importance of non-state actors, already observed above**; (iii) **increased interlinkages between policy domains**; and (iv) **more opportunities for citizen involvement**. Challenges thus stem from new institutions, new actors, new issues and demands for greater legitimacy. While most authors would agree about the key transformations of multilateralism, differences in understanding it both as finality and as an instrument, depending on various contexts, persist.

Today, the conceptual debates about the contemporary global order are far from settled. Making sense of its logic and functioning is more than just an intellectual exercise. If one agrees that more and more political problems require solutions at a global level — and the interdependence that became most evident through the global economic-financial crises pleads in favour of this perspective — then **the understanding of how this new order functions is primordial for making world affairs manageable. It is also key to determining the EU’s position within them.**

## 2.2. Europe as a global actor: what is European Union foreign policy?

Against the backdrop of this discussion of the global landscape the European Union operates in, a question that is highly pertinent for the type of issues addressed in this Review — and often only implicitly dealt with — is what precisely is meant when one speaks of Europe as a ‘global actor’. Clarity on what EU foreign policy entails helps to appropriately evaluate the potential and challenges for the EU’s global actorhood. It also allows for better understanding and attributing responsibilities for outcomes of EU foreign policy. The concept itself consists of two components that need to be examined separately: EU and foreign policy. Before this, however, it is necessary to delimit the scope of contemporary EU foreign policy.

**In the early 21st century, the European Union is active in a broad range of global policy domains.** It would therefore be an undue simplification to restrict EU foreign policy to its common foreign and security policy. **CFSP** and **EU defence policies** (CSDP) **are major**

<sup>(25)</sup> Bouchard/Peterson, op.cit., 2010 [MERCURY]; Wouters, J., Basu, S., and Schunz, S., *Meeting the challenges of a multilateralized world? The ‘multilaterality’ of the European Union*, Centre for Global Governance Studies, Leuven, 2008.

<sup>(26)</sup> Van Langenhove, L., ‘The Transformation of Multilateralism, Mode 1.0 to Mode 2.0’, *Global Policy*, 2010, 1(3): 263–270 [EU-GRASP].

**components of a much more ‘multifaceted’ EU foreign policy** <sup>(27)</sup>. It involves significant areas of EU external action such as trade or development and external dimensions of EU internal policies (e.g. on migration). What is more, EU foreign policy extends to virtually all countries, neighbouring as well as faraway regions and key international organisations. In total, the EU has 139 delegations in countries and with multilateral institutions (e.g. the UN in New York) all over the world, adding to the impressive network of diplomatic missions of its Member States (Box 1) <sup>(28)</sup>. Apart from that, the Union entertains relations with a plethora of non-governmental actors and increasingly engages in public diplomacy <sup>(29)</sup>. EU foreign policy thus addresses global issues and players in a very comprehensive manner. By emphasising EU foreign policy on economic, environmental and security issues and vis-à-vis the wider world (as opposed to its neighbourhood), this Review makes a deliberate choice to consider only a — albeit significant — subset of these policies.

With this broad understanding of the scope of EU foreign policy in mind, **foreign policy** can be defined as actors’ ‘actions (...) directed toward objectives, conditions and actors — both governmental and non-governmental — which they want to affect and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy’ <sup>(30)</sup>. In other words, **foreign policy is understood as ‘directed at the external environment with the objective of influencing that environment and the behaviour of other actors within it, in order to pursue interests, values and goals’** <sup>(31)</sup>. Based on this definition, two major steps in what could be termed the ‘foreign policy cycle’ can be distinguished: foreign policymaking and foreign policy implementation. First, foreign policy is formulated (made) by a set of actors (e.g. ministries of foreign affairs, sectoral ministries). These actors rely on overarching (constitutional) objectives to define and construct foreign policies, whether issue- or country-/region-specific. Foreign policy positions are then ‘not self-executing’ <sup>(32)</sup>. Rather, a significant step consists in defining the strategy and instruments to use in order to bring about the desired policy outcomes. This second stage of foreign policy, its implementation, is the realm of diplomacy. Diplomacy can rely on various tools, which range from pure exchanges with the purpose of persuading interlocutors to incentivising, often economic tools (carrots) and coercive instruments such as sanctions (sticks) <sup>(33)</sup>. The procedures of foreign policymaking and foreign policy implementation/diplomacy can be different: diverging sets of actors can be involved and various procedures can be used for decision-making. The difference between the two constituencies can be particularly pronounced (and problematic) in the EU context.

Defining **European Union** foreign policy is therefore also less straightforward. In conceptual terms, the EU is often considered as a multilevel, multi-actor system of governance involving EU

<sup>(27)</sup> Keukeleire and Delreux, op. cit., 2014, 1.

<sup>(28)</sup> Telò, M., ‘The EU: A Civilian Power’s Diplomatic Action after the Lisbon Treaty — Bridging Internal Complexity and International Convergence’, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU’s Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 27–64 [GR:EEEN]; see also online (<http://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/>).

<sup>(29)</sup> Duke, S., *The European External Action Service and Public Diplomacy*, Clingendael, The Hague, 2013.

<sup>(30)</sup> Carlsnaes, W., ‘Foreign Policy’, in Carlsnaes, W., Risse, T., and Simmons, B. A. (eds.), *Handbook of International Relations*, Sage, London, 2002, 331–349, 335.

<sup>(31)</sup> Keukeleire/Delreux, op. cit., 2014, 1.

<sup>(32)</sup> Brighi, E., and Hill, C., ‘Implementation and behaviour’, in Smith, S., Hadfield, A., and Dunne, T. (eds.), *Foreign Policy — Theories — Actors — Cases*, Oxford UP, Oxford, 2008, 117–136.

<sup>(33)</sup> Holsti, K. J., *International Politics: A Framework for Analysis*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1995.

institutions and Member States as constitutive units. **EU foreign policy is thus more than the sum of the foreign policies of its 28 Member States. It is also more than the foreign policy conducted by EU institutions. It encompasses both dimensions**, even if not all national foreign policy by EU Member States necessarily qualifies as EU foreign policy. As a result, and given the broad scope of the EU's involvement in global affairs, how the Union presents itself varies in line with contexts:

- in areas where it possesses exclusive competences (especially trade), external interlocutors will first and foremost be confronted to the European Commission, which in reality is of course subject to supervision by the Member States;
- in areas of shared competence, the EU can be represented by the Commission, the Member State holding the rotating presidency of the Council, the High Representative or teams of staff from the Commission and/or the EEAS and Member States, depending on issues;
- in still other domains, where the EU's competence is supplementary (e.g. health) or shared, but with strong Member State involvement (e.g. energy diplomacy), the presidency or individual Member States might represent the EU.

Complicating matters further, important differences can exist in a single issue area between EU internal policymaking and EU foreign policy. Examples of this are climate and energy policies.

### 2.3. The legal-institutional framework of EU foreign policy: set-up and tools

If one understands EU foreign policy as an attempt — by EU institutions or Member States acting in line with EU interests, values and goals — at influencing the external environment through diplomacy, the final set of questions before examining cases relates to how it is concretely organised at this point in time. This calls for a look at the formal legal framework under the Lisbon Treaty, the institutional structures and actors of EU foreign policy and the instruments the EU has at its disposal. At this point, the analysis focuses on the general opportunity structures and limits of the EU as a global actor (*Who can do what and how?*).

Turning to the **legal framework** for EU foreign policy under the Treaty of Lisbon <sup>(34)</sup>, with Article 47 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the Union now possesses legal personality. This implies that it can enter into relations with third countries in all domains, regardless of its competences <sup>(35)</sup>. Yet, this is not to say that the European Commission would shoulder all the work. Rather, the TEU makes a clear distinction between the CFSP, defined as covering 'all areas of foreign policy and all questions relating to the Union's security' (including defence) (Article 24.1 TEU), and other

<sup>(34)</sup> See also Emerson, M., Balfour, R., Corthaut, T., Wouters, J., Kaczynski, P., and Renard, T., *Upgrading the EU's Role as Global Actor — Institutions, Law and the Restructuring of European Diplomacy*, CEPS, Brussels, 2011; Telò, op. cit., 2013 [GREEN].

<sup>(35)</sup> Emerson et al., op. cit., 2011, 21.

areas. This becomes particularly clear when the Treaty indicates that the ‘High Representative (...) shall represent the Union for matters relating to the common foreign and security policy. He shall conduct political dialogue with third parties on the Union’s behalf and express the Union’s position in international organisations and at international conferences’ (Article 27.2 TEU) <sup>(36)</sup>. The High Representative, a novelty introduced with the Treaty, carries a double hat: he or she is Vice-President of the Commission, but also chairs the Foreign Affairs Council (Article 27.1 TEU). In contrast to the HR’s responsibilities, the ‘Commission shall (...) with the exception of the common foreign and security policy, and other cases provided for in the Treaties (...) ensure the Union’s external representation’ (Article 17.1 TEU). In procedural terms, the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) foresees for the negotiation of international agreements that it is either the Commission or the HR (in cases where principally CFSP matters are concerned) who ‘shall submit recommendations to the Council, which shall adopt a decision (...) nominating the Union negotiator or the head of the Union’s negotiating team’ (Article 218 TFEU). The interpretation of these rules has caused much stir following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, and the issue is still not settled <sup>(37)</sup>. **In practice, in many areas the task-sharing between EU foreign policy actors relies on pragmatic ad hoc solutions or the setting forth of pre-existing arrangements.**

The creation of the post of the High Representative was accompanied by another significant institutional novelty, the **European External Action Service (EEAS)**. **The original intention behind the creation of this body was to enable the Union to speak with ‘one voice’ on foreign and security policies.** Prior to setting up the Service, the prospect of a genuine European diplomatic corps had sparked the emergence of an important body of literature. Key questions related to the institutional structure (organogram) and to whether the EU was in any form ‘special’, as the first entity to rely on a corps of post-national diplomats. The discussion about the Service reached once again a peak around the time of its first Review in mid 2013 <sup>(38)</sup>. The key echo from this literature is that the EEAS, **created through ‘a series of political compromises (...) rather than (...) grand design’, represents a hybrid entity — with staff of the Commission’s former Directorate-General for External Relations, the Council Secretariat and Member State diplomats — which has so far not fully delivered on the hopes that had accompanied its invention** <sup>(39)</sup>. The EEAS itself recognised this in its 2013 review. While this report acknowledged how difficult it was — and continues to be — to set up a pan-European diplomatic service, it also pointed out that there ‘is clearly scope for the EEAS to use its unique position in the EU institutional framework to promote the strategic direction of

<sup>(36)</sup> At the level of Heads of State or Government, this representative function is not assured by the HR, but by the President of the European Council (Article 15.6 TEU).

<sup>(37)</sup> Corthaut, T., and Van Eeckhoutte, D., ‘Legal Aspects of EU Participation in Global Environmental Governance under the UN Umbrella’, in Wouters, J., Bruyninckx, H., Basu, S., and Schunz, S. (eds.), *The European Union and Multilateral Governance: Assessing EU Participation in United Nations Human Rights and Environmental Fora*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, 145–170.

<sup>(38)</sup> See, for example, Telò and Ponjaert, op. cit., 2013 [GREEN]; European Parliament, *The Organisation and Functioning of the European External Action Service: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities*, European Parliament, Brussels, 2013.

<sup>(39)</sup> Lequesne, C., ‘The European External Action Service: Can a new institution improve the coherence of the EU foreign policy?’, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU’s Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 79–86 [GREEN].

the EU's external action' <sup>(40)</sup>. Yet, this report also points to the limits of this undeniable potential. In the foreword to the report signed by Catherine Ashton, she herself made it clear that 'Europe's role in the world is one of the major challenges of the 21st century. The EEAS is but one component of Europe's response to this global challenge' <sup>(41)</sup>. And indeed, in many areas in which the EU acts as a global actor, the EEAS has so far little if any resources (Box 1). This is true for such crucial domains as development, climate change or energy policies. In these domains, tasks are either entirely shouldered by other services, such as the Commission's Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation, Directorate-General for Climate Action or Directorate-General for Energy, or by the Member States, or they are shared between various players, mirroring the ambiguous division of labour sketched out in the Treaty articles discussed above. **As a result, the foreign policy machinery of the EU remains de facto rather complex, and the EEAS often unable to live up to its full potential.** As Carta (GR:EEN) puts it, 'personal factors and bureaucratic turf battles, the creation of new institutions and a quite unstructured plan on how to reform the system added complexity to an already complicated system' <sup>(42)</sup>.

### Box 1. The European External Action Service — key figures (2013)

- The EEAS had about **3 400 staff** in mid 2013, divided between Brussels headquarters (about 1 450) and EU delegations (about 1 950).
- Out of this total figure, about **900 staff** were **senior officials**. Roughly 600 of these officials came from former Commission services or the Council Secretariat. The additional 300 officials were seconded from national diplomatic services for a limited duration of time (temporary agents).
- The objective of the EEAS is to maintain 60 % permanent staff and to attract a stable share of 1/3 of senior staff from national diplomatic services.
- The EEAS has to be seen as part of a **broader EU foreign policy machinery**. The sole ministries of foreign affairs of the (then) 27 EU Member States were estimated to have **over 85 000 staff** in early 2013.
- **The EEAS thus represents only roughly 4 % of the total number of foreign policy professionals in the European Union.**

Sources: Ashton, C., *EEAS Review*, European External Action Service, Brussels, 2013; Balfour, R., and Raik, K., *The EEAS and national diplomacies*, EPC, Brussels, 2013.

<sup>(40)</sup> Ashton, C., *EEAS Review*, European External Action Service, Brussels, 2013, 7.

<sup>(41)</sup> Ibid.

<sup>(42)</sup> Carta, C., 'The EEAS and EU Executive Actors with the Foreign Policy-Cycle, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 87–104, 102 [GR:EEN].

The legal-institutional framework does not only indicate who does what, but also provides for an answer to the question of how the EU is to implement its foreign policies. It possesses a wide range of foreign policy tools, based on both economic incentives and diplomatic exchanges <sup>(43)</sup>. Economic incentives can be positive (e.g. concluding trade, cooperation or association agreements, providing aid) or negative (e.g. impose embargos or boycotts, delay or suspend agreements, reduce aid). Issuing *démarches* or declarations and visits to other countries are forms of diplomatic action. While this classification focusses on the mechanisms of social interaction between the EU and third parties, another classification highlights the EU's choice of the (number of) external actors it approaches. Here, three choices generally exist: multilateral, bilateral or unilateral action. Where the latter is seldom an option for an entity like the EU, multilateralism is not only an organisational form of global governance, but also a foreign policy tool the EU regularly employs, albeit with increasing difficulties in the contemporary global order. Bilateralism has, in more recent years, also been promoted as a tool of EU foreign policy, especially via strategic partnerships.

---

<sup>(43)</sup> Smith, K. E., *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2003.



### 3. The European Union as a global actor — key themes



From the projects covered in this Review, a set of significant themes on the EU's role as a global actor can be extracted. Three of these themes are covered in this section. It starts off with a review of the EU's role in multilateral forums, covering its capacities, activities, strategies and outcomes. A similar analysis is then undertaken for the EU as a bilateral actor. Finally, based on these two discussions, it addresses the question what role the EU plays in the contemporary global order by also bringing in how non-European actors see the Union.

## 3.1. The EU as a multilateral player

### 3.1.1. Foundations and capacities

Multilateralism lies at the heart of the EU's activities as a global player. Not only is the Union itself a multilateral entity, but it has also openly embraced 'effective multilateralism' as a key foreign policy strategy <sup>(44)</sup>. While Article 21 TEU states that the EU 'shall promote multilateral solutions to common problems, in particular in the framework of the United Nations' and 'promote an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and good global governance', its adherence to multilateralism has been most strongly articulated in the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), which was updated in 2008 <sup>(45)</sup>. Like the 2003 Commission communication *The choice of multilateralism*, the ESS stated that the EU displayed a natural support for the values of multilateralism and 'for multilateral solutions to global problems', and that **'effective multilateralism' was intended as both a means for and a normative end of EU global activities** <sup>(46)</sup>.

The concept of 'effective multilateralism' has triggered much debate in policy and academic circles <sup>(47)</sup>. One part of the debate concentrated on the demand side: What were the problems the EU needed to tackle in a multilateral fashion, which global public goods would it have to provide, and which actors would it need to be collaborating with? It came to the conclusion that there is a growing (internal and external) demand for the Union to promote globally concerted solutions with key global actors around a whole range of collective action issues, such as migration or resource scarcity <sup>(48)</sup>. Other parts of the debate stressed the Union's offer to the world and examined what it needed to underpin its ambition to act effectively multilaterally. If effective multilateralism implies

<sup>(44)</sup> Klein, N., Reiners, W., Zhimin, C., Junbo, J., and Slosarcik, I., *Diplomatic Strategies of Major Powers: Competing Patterns of International Relations? — The Cases of the United States of America, China and the European Union*, MERCURY E-paper No 2, 2010 [MERCURY]; Biscop, S., and Gibney, S. G., *Multilateralism at the Heart of the European Security Strategy*, EU-GRASP Working Paper No 13, 2010 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(45)</sup> European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World — European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003; European Council, *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy — Providing Security in a Changing World*, Doc. S407/08, Brussels, 11 December 2008.

<sup>(46)</sup> European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament — The European Union and United Nations: The choice of multilateralism*, (COM(2003) 526), Brussels, 10 September 2003.

<sup>(47)</sup> Lazarou et al., *op. cit.*, 2010 [MERCURY].

<sup>(48)</sup> MERCURY project, *Final report*, 2012, 3.

a form of activity leading to coordinated actions among multiple parties that result in outcomes acceptable to these parties, the question is which capacities the EU requires to be such an effective multilateral player (*What is its 'multilaterability'?*)<sup>(49)</sup>. When examining these EU capacities for multilateral actions, the general observations on the Union's legal-institutional framework made above largely apply. Yet, since its multilaterability mostly plays out in United Nations forums, additional factors come into play. In terms of conditions that should normally facilitate EU performance, the **Union is supposed to have an exceptionally high potential for effective action in the UN system**. Being a multilateral entity, it has internalised the rules of the game of multilateralism, which are often said to form part of its DNA. Moreover, when it speaks in the UN, it usually represents the positions of 28 states (plus often several associated countries), which gives it significant diplomatic weight. Finally, it has attractive ideational and material offers for many countries, which may either be seduced by the values defended by EU (external) policies and/or hope for economic benefits from an engagement with this 'market power' (e.g. via preferential trade agreements; development aid)<sup>(50)</sup>. However, the EU is also often said not to be more than the sum of its parts<sup>(51)</sup>, and the fact that it is itself a multilateral (non-state) entity can also be a factor that inhibits its performance in multilateral contexts. On the one hand, this has to do with the complex *internal* institutional set-up described earlier, which leads to **significant coordination needs and to an external representation mix that has earned the Union the qualification of 'patchwork power', given the immense number of different forms of representation that coexist**<sup>(52)</sup>. This situation results not only from internal legal rules and political tensions, however, but, on the other hand, also from the *international* legal framework. The United Nations remains intergovernmental in nature, and an entity that is not a nation-state needs to apply for a status. In many forums, the Union has managed to obtain observer or full participant status (with no voting and limited speaking rights). It is an observer, for example, in many UN programmes (e.g. UNDP, Unicef) and specialised agencies (e.g. the ILO, Unesco). In the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), which marks a particularly interesting case further discussed below, the Union has been an enhanced observer since 2011. **In a few multilateral forums, the EU is even a member with full speaking and voting rights, placing it on an equal footing with its Member States** (e.g. the FAO; outside UN: the WTO). If the EU exercises its right to vote in such forums, the Member States cannot then exercise their right to vote.

Beyond the UN, the EU's representation is equally complex. In the evermore important G20, several EU Member States are directly represented alongside the EU because they figure among the major economies of the world (France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, while Spain and the Netherlands have regularly been associated). The EU itself is, at finance minister level, represented by the European Commission, the Council Presidency and the European Central Bank. At head of state level, representation is shared between the Presidents of the European Council and the

<sup>(49)</sup> Duke, S., 'Form and substance in the EU's multilateral diplomacy', in Jorgensen, K. E., and Laatikainen, K. L. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions*, Routledge, London, 2013, 15–26; Wouters et al., op. cit., 2008.

<sup>(50)</sup> Damro, C., 'Market Power Europe', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2012, 19(5): 682–699 [MERCURY].

<sup>(51)</sup> Van Schaik, L., *EU Effectiveness and Unity in Multilateral Negotiations — More than the Sum of its Parts?*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke and New York, 2013.

<sup>(52)</sup> Gstöhl, S., "'Patchwork Power" Europe: The EU's Representation in International Institutions', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 2009, 9(3): 385–403.

European Commission, depending on issue areas. While the Union's representation is thus strong in numerical terms, there are also downsides. Since not all Member States are participants to the G20, the privileged access of some — which are in fact doubly represented (as a state and via the EU) — can cause problems. Coordinating among the EU-28 and granting non-G20 EU countries access to all relevant information are therefore primordial tasks. A similar situation exists also for the UN Security Council (with a very limited role for the EU) and for global forums to which not all Member States have acceded (e.g. International Energy Agency).

In synthesis, whenever the EU acts in multilateral bodies, it does so either with a strong legal status (e.g. the FAO), or it has a status through which it shares its powers with the Member States (e.g. the UN General Assembly) or the Member States dominate EU representation. Yet, higher legal status does not necessarily imply more effective activities, which is why it is interesting to observe how the Union's multilateral value base and capacities play out in practice <sup>(53)</sup>.

### 3.1.2. Activities and outcomes

The EU engages in an important number of multilateral relationships <sup>(54)</sup> and was, as of 2011, party to 249 multilateral treaties <sup>(55)</sup>. Numerous case studies have been conducted on the Union as a multilateral player, in efforts to compare its value-based rhetoric and strategic choices to the reality of its multilateral activities and their effects. Emphasis is placed here on major multilateral bodies and on economic, environmental and security issues.

#### *The EU in the UN General Assembly*

When assessing the EU's role across the UN system, the **UN General Assembly** is of significance as the major forum in which the United Nations take strategic decisions. The EU's role in this forum has been studied for decades, with a prominent focus on quantitative analyses of the voting behaviour of its Member States. **Research has demonstrated that the EU-28 voting patterns in the UN General Assembly have generally become more coherent over time** <sup>(56)</sup>. It has to be noted however that such purely quantitative indicators do not necessarily account for divergences, since they do not distinguish between salient and less crucial issues.

---

<sup>(53)</sup> Bryuninckx, H., Wouters, J., Basu, S., and Schunz, S., 'The Position(s) of the EU in the UN System: The Examples of Human Rights and Environmental Governance', in Wouters, J., Bruyninckx, H., Basu, S., and Schunz, S. (eds.), *The European Union and Multilateral Governance: Assessing EU Participation in United Nations Human Rights and Environmental Fora*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, 253–282; Jorgensen, K., and Wessel, R., 'The Position of the European Union in (other) international organizations: confronting legal and political approaches', in Koutrakos, P. (ed.), *European Foreign Policy — Legal and Political Perspectives*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2011, 261–286.

<sup>(54)</sup> Fanta, E., *Mapping of EU's Global Cooperation*, EU-GRASP Working Paper No 5, 2010 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(55)</sup> Emerson et al., op. cit., 2011, 3.

<sup>(56)</sup> See, for example, Luif, P., *EU cohesion in the UN General Assembly*, ISS Occasional Papers No 49, Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2003.

It is in the UNGA that the EU wanted to obtain recognition for its reinforced foreign policy capacities after the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. Based on its newly gained legal personality, it first requested an upgrade of its observer status in the General Assembly in the autumn of 2010. This request was initially blocked by other UN members. A watered down version of a resolution granting the Union enhanced observer status was later accepted in an UNGA resolution of May 2011<sup>(57)</sup>. It recalls that ‘the General Assembly is an intergovernmental body whose membership is limited to States that are Members of the United Nations’, but grants the EU slightly greater participation rights (e.g. to be inscribed on the list of speakers, have its communications circulated as UNGA documents). However, in light of the diplomatic incidence that the earlier rejection of its request brought with it, and given the high initial hopes the Union had placed on this upgrade, the advances were relatively limited and symbolic rather than substantial. The negotiation of this institutional matter illustrated, to many observers, the EU’s deficiencies as well as its capacities in the UN system more generally. Initially, the Union’s request was voted down by a number of (mostly) developing countries because they feared among others a privileged position for the EU. Their reticence demonstrated also that the Union had not explained its move well, which had been based on complex internal legal structures often hard to grasp for non-European parties. After the rebuttal of its initiative, reinforced, concerted (among EU actors) and targeted (at key reluctant third countries like those from CARICOM, the Caribbean Community and Common Market) activity showed that **‘when EU institutions and Member States act in concert, implementing the principles of consultation, solidarity and convergence grounded in the Treaty, the EU can be an effective actor on the global scene’**<sup>(58)</sup>.

### *The EU and multilateral security governance*

Going beyond the focus on quantitative assessments of its members’ voting behaviour and this particular case of EU diplomacy regarding its own institutional representation, the EUROROADMAP project also studied the EU’s role in the UNGA from a qualitative perspective. Based on an analysis of the Union’s actions in the six committees of the General Assembly, Delcour comes to the conclusion that **‘the influence of the EU at the UN is at best uneven and dependent on the issues at stake’, with weaknesses in security matters and an often stronger performance on matters related to socioeconomic issues**<sup>(59)</sup>. To take the example of security policy, the EU is de facto represented on the UNGA First Committee (Security and Disarmament), but France and the United Kingdom as the two EU members with permanent seats on the UN Security Council regularly break ranks<sup>(60)</sup>. An examination of an array of topics dealt with by this committee (e.g. nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation) concludes that the EU has *not* attained a ‘high profile and (not) demonstrated a great deal of unity and consistency’<sup>(61)</sup>. On the contrary, strong cleavages among EU Member States (e.g. between NATO and non-NATO members) implied that **‘coherent**

<sup>(57)</sup> [http://www.un.org/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/276](http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/276)

<sup>(58)</sup> Grevi, G., *From Lisbon to New York: The EU at the UN General Assembly*, Policy Brief, FRIDE, Madrid, 2011, 5.

<sup>(59)</sup> Delcour, B., *The EU at the UNGA*, EUROROADMAP Paper No 37, 2011 [EUROROADMAP].

<sup>(60)</sup> The EU is not represented per se on the Security Council.

<sup>(61)</sup> Delcour, op. cit., 2011, 14.

**EU action is frequently not within the realms of possibility' in the security domain** <sup>(62)</sup>. Coordination needs among Member States slow EU reactions down, in particular in crisis situations, with the result that the Union hardly achieves its outcomes in this arena.

While the EU is often relatively cacophonous on security matters, in other areas the quest for unity can lead to watered down messages. Hence, a second conclusion from the analysis of the EU's work within the UNGA is that **'the importance of 'speaking with one voice' and the mechanisms put in place in order to guarantee more unity have been detrimental to the EU's overall level of influence. The substance of the messages delivered in the name of the EU is often too introspective and lacking in clarity from a political point of view'** <sup>(63)</sup>. This observation is supported by other researchers and for other bodies in the UN system, such as the Human Rights Council <sup>(64)</sup>.

### *The EU and multilateral economic and trade governance*

When it comes to EU activities in global multilateral governance beyond the UNGA and the core UN bodies, economic and trade issues are of central importance. Based on a review of the EU's representation across major global economic forums (the WTO, IMF, World Bank, G8, G20), a **situation of 'over-representation and under-effectiveness of the European Union in international economic relations' has frequently been observed** <sup>(65)</sup>. As a matter of fact, the Union is, in terms of numbers, voting rights and monetary contribution to these institutions, very well represented. To mention only two examples, in the WTO, the 28 EU members plus the EU as separate entity account for over 18 % of the 159 members this body had in 2013, and the four EU Member States and the Commission account for one quarter of the entire G20 membership (Table 1). In spite of this solid representation, analysts see the Union's role in the G20 in decline <sup>(66)</sup>. Experiences with the last G20 presidency of an EU Member State (France) demonstrated that the Union was internally divided on some of the French presidency's proposals (such as on the financial transaction tax) and that decision-making in preparation of the major summit in November 2011 in Cannes had not functioned very well <sup>(67)</sup>. In more general terms, the United States and China have mostly dominated the central debates on economic and financial governance in the body over the past years <sup>(68)</sup>. While the G20 is still relatively new as a major global forum, the

<sup>(62)</sup> Rasch, M., *Single Actorness Nonexistent — EU Security Policy at the UN*, GARNET Working Paper 35/08, 26, 2008 [GARNET].

<sup>(63)</sup> Delcour, op. cit., 2011, 37.

<sup>(64)</sup> Smith, K., 'The European Union at the Human Rights Council: speaking with one voice but having little influence', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 2010, 17(2): 224–241; Carta, C., 'The EU in Geneva: The Diplomatic Representation of a System of Governance', *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 2013, 9(3): 406–423 [GREEN].

<sup>(65)</sup> Pisany-Ferry, J., 'The accidental player: The European Union and the global economy', in Jorgensen, K. E. (ed.), *The European Union and International Organizations*, Routledge, London, 2009, 34, 21–36 [GARNET].

<sup>(66)</sup> Jokela, J., *Europe's declining role in the G20*, Briefing Paper 96, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, 2011.

<sup>(67)</sup> As an illustration, Jokela mentions the Union's preparation for key discussions at the Cannes summit: 'While the Presidents of the EU institutions and the chair of the Eurogroup were involved in the decision-making, the other 11 eurozone countries were merely consulted — if consulted at all — while non-euro members were clearly left on the decision-making periphery' (op. cit., 2011, 8).

<sup>(68)</sup> Garrett, G., 'G2 in G20: China, the United States and the World after the Global Financial Crisis', *Global Policy*, 2010, 1(1): 29–37.

medium-term challenge for the EU therefore consists in whether it can resist US and Chinese pressures for discussing important global economic matters in a small club of big powers. Where this club scenario would imply a stronger role for individual EU members (Germany, France, Italy, the United Kingdom) to the detriment of the Union per se, the **alternative option for the EU is to strive to make the G20 the new nucleus of a more balanced global multilateral system**. This would, among other things, necessitate greater internal unity and closer ties with the emerging countries. Questions related to the future institutional design of the forum are thus as important as the actual socioeconomic agenda items it deals with. To effectively respond to them, the EU needs to further develop its foreign policy capacities and strategies regarding the G20. This requires improving existing coordination mechanisms and developing a clear vision of what role it wants this body to play in the global governance of the 21st century.

The situation in the **trade** domain is slightly different. The EU is a ‘trading power’ and a multilayered EU trade diplomacy has gradually emerged over the past 50 years (Box 2). As an exclusive competence of the EU, external trade policy has been in the hands of the Commission, under the strict oversight of the Member States, and with increasing input from the European Parliament in recent years. Over time, the Union has transformed from a ‘defensive neo-mercantilist GATT player to (a) proactive, post-modern trade liberaliser in the WTO’<sup>(69)</sup>. Since the creation of the WTO in 1994, the EU has indeed attempted to advance its liberalisation agenda — with clear limitations however when it comes to the notion of ‘effective multilateralism’. These limits concern, on the one hand, the Union’s protectionist tendencies regarding especially agricultural products. EU positions on this matter are much to the regret of developing countries wanting to export their products to Europe. Tensions resulting from these differences have contributed to the initial failure of the multilateral Doha Development Round<sup>(70)</sup>.

On the other hand, **the EU is far from an unconditionally multilateral actor in the trade domain**. Since its strategic shift embodied in the 2006 Commission communication *Global Europe: Competing in the world*, multiple preferential trade agreements (PTA) testify to strong bilateral reflexes and the willingness to exploit its market power whenever this is to its advantage<sup>(71)</sup>. To give two examples: in 2011, the Union concluded a bilateral Free Trade Agreement with South Korea, while PTA talks with the Gulf Cooperation Council have ‘been regarded as a way of ensuring access to Gulf oil and fostering stability in the region using the EU’s market attraction as a means of exchange’<sup>(72)</sup>. What is more, it has been noted that Member States pursue parallel trade policies in efforts to obtain competitive advantages. Germany is often cited as particularly prone to adopting

<sup>(69)</sup> Mortensen, J., ‘The World Trade Organization and the European Union’, in Jorgensen, K. E. (ed.), *The European Union and International Organizations*, Routledge, London, 2009, 80–100, 89 [GARNET].

<sup>(70)</sup> The Doha Development Round is the latest round of negotiations that started in 2001 with the aim of further trade liberalisation under the WTO umbrella. Since 2008, talks have been stalled over disputes between developed and emerging countries related to agriculture, services and a few other issues.

<sup>(71)</sup> European Commission, Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the committee of the regions — *Global Europe: Competing in the world — A Contribution to the EU’s Growth and Jobs Strategy*, (COM(2006) 567), Brussels, 4 October 2006.

<sup>(72)</sup> Garcia, M., ‘From idealism to realism? EU preferential trade agreement policy’, *Journal of Contemporary European Research*, 2013, 9(4): 521–541, 526.

a nationally inspired trade and investment strategy, notably vis-à-vis China, but France, Spain, Denmark, the Netherlands and Poland are acting in similar ways <sup>(73)</sup>.

**Nevertheless, despite growing bilateral trade activities and protectionist reflexes, the EU remains crucial to the multilateral trade regime.** Following the partial agreement reached at the most recent round of WTO negotiations in December 2013 in Bali, the Union finds itself in a key position to provide further impetus toward a closure of the Doha Development Round. Based on her research in the framework of the GR:EEN project, Dee identifies several actions the EU could undertake to further contribute to effective multilateralism in this domain <sup>(74)</sup>: (i) display further flexibility on its positions regarding agriculture; (ii) promote a swift conclusion of the trade negotiations with the United States (on the transatlantic trade and investment agreement, discussed below) and stronger engagement of the latter in the WTO; (iii) reinforce cooperation with the emerging economies; and (iv) use the G20 to de-block the negotiations, which implies effectively employing complementary global economic forums to contribute to problem-solving.

**Altogether, by virtue of its market power, the EU is a major and often effective bi- and multilateral trade diplomat, but displays clear insufficiencies when it comes to participation in global economic governance more widely.**

## Box 2. The European Union as a trading power

- The **EU is the largest economy in the world**, with a GDP per head of EUR 25 000 for a population of little over 500 million.
- It is the **world's largest trading block** and largest trader of manufactured goods and services and ranks first in both inbound and outbound international investments.
- The EU is the top trading partner for 80 countries. By comparison, the United States is the No 1 trading partner for some 20 countries.
- The EU trades extensively with developing countries. It imports more from developing countries than the United States, Canada, Japan and China combined (fuels excluded).

*Source:* Directorate-General for Trade, *EU position in world trade*, European Commission, Brussels, 2013 (<http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/eu-position-in-world-trade/>).

<sup>(73)</sup> Youngs, R., and Springford, J., 'Europe's trade strategy: promise or peril?', in Fabry, E. (ed.), *Think global — Act European — Thinking Strategically about the EU's External Action*, Notre Europe, Paris, 2013, 39–49, 40–41.

<sup>(74)</sup> Dee, M., *The European Union and the WTO Post-Bali Work Programme*, Policy Brief, 2013 [GR:EEN].

## *The EU and multilateral climate governance*

Climate change represents an evermore important case of EU multilateral activity <sup>(75)</sup>. The founding treaty of today's multilateral global climate regime, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, was negotiated in 1991–92. During that period, the EU did not yet possess a common foreign policy worthy of that name. Nonetheless, concerted action among EU members and the Commission at that time, based on the desire to lead global discussions on this important matter, led the Union to adopt a rather active stance. In the negotiations that followed in the mid 1990s and resulted in the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, the Union was then — together with the United States and Japan — instrumental to the final outcome. The Protocol stipulated binding greenhouse gas emission reductions of about 5 % over 2008–12 from the 1990 levels for the group of industrialised country parties. In 2001, when it became clear that the United States would not ratify the Protocol, the EU engaged in exhaustive diplomatic efforts to gather support for its ratification. Partially, as a result of this activity, Russia adopted the Protocol in late 2004, and the treaty entered into force in 2005.

Since then, multilateral negotiations have been ongoing on a reformed climate regime. They evolve in the largely transformed world order discussed in Section 2. **Although the EU has actively tried to lead these negotiations 'by example', i.e. by trying to demonstrate that emissions reductions are possible internally (especially via emissions trading) and promoting ambitious actions vis-à-vis other partners, the global context has proven to be very difficult.** The Union is no longer one of only three major emitters, as it had been during the 1990s. The emissions of other players, especially those of the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) are rising steeply. As a result — and in contrast to what had been agreed at the time of the Kyoto Protocol — the emerging world nowadays needs to be part of the solution alongside industrialised states. In this situation, the Union's leadership-by-example approach of the 2000s was also intended to appeal to other parties to develop on a low-carbon path. At the 2009 conference of the parties to the UN climate regime in Copenhagen, this strategy did not lead to the legally binding outcome enshrining ambitious reduction targets that the EU had desired. Pointing to the principle of common, but differentiated responsibilities, the developing world (including major emerging countries) refused to take on binding emissions reductions. At the same time, major non-European industrialised countries, especially the United States, were not willing to be bound by international legal rules either. Incidentally, the Union's negotiators — and many of those coming from the developing world — were largely sidelined during the final stages of talks. The summit ended with a minimum common denominator deal essentially negotiated between the BASIC countries and the United States (Copenhagen Accord). After the summit, the Union's approach, but also the way it had defended it, were criticised for their inflexibility <sup>(76)</sup>. Among others, it had insisted on a legally binding outcome when other parties had signalled that this was no longer possible, depriving it of potential greater leverage. Since 2010, following successful agenda-setting from the EU in cooperation with

<sup>(75)</sup> On what follows, see Van Schaik, L., 'The European Union and the climate change regime', in Jorgensen, K. E., and Laatikainen, K. L. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook on the European Union and International Institutions*, Routledge, London, 2013, 357–370; Schunz, S., 'The EU in the United Nations Climate Change Regime', in Wouters, J., Bruyninckx, H., Basu, S., and Schunz, S. (eds.), *The European Union and Multilateral Governance: Assessing EU Participation in United Nations Human Rights and Environmental Fora*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012, 191–213.

<sup>(76)</sup> See Van Schaik, op. cit., 2013.

developing countries at the 2011 summit in Durban <sup>(77)</sup>, South Africa, the UN regime talks have been reinigorated. The novel objective is to adopt an ‘agreed outcome with legal force’ implicating developed and developing countries at the 2015 Paris summit, which would then enter into force as of 2020. In the meantime, voluntary pledges are being implemented by many global players. The EU itself has pledged 20 % reductions from 1990 levels by 2020, and is engaged in strategic debates about its internal and external climate policy positions for the 2030/50 time horizons.

All in all, while it has long aspired to lead global efforts for an effective multilateral climate regime, and even if it has been able to effectively impact global climate politics agendas at certain moments, **EU activities have, to date, not contributed to a durable solution of the problem of climate change through globally concerted, legally binding action. Particularly the experience of the Copenhagen summit demonstrated that the Union was not acting in line with its main interlocutors’ logic of action and interests.** Where the EU promoted environmental objectives, other players perceived global climate politics as a major arena for foreign policy. **If it wants to promote effective multilateral cooperation in this crucial policy domain, the EU needs to adapt its climate diplomacy more adequately to this context. This may imply reinforced coordination between the Commission’s Directorate-General for Climate Action and the EEAS** <sup>(78)</sup>.

Altogether, **the EU is generally a highly active multilateral player.** Yet, regular resorting to bilateralism, but also parallel bilateral activities of EU Member States, imply that **‘effective multilateralism’ often remains, both as a means and an end, a ‘distant goal’ for the EU** <sup>(79)</sup>. **This observation underscores a lack of EU strategy within and across multilateral forums, which may plead for an update of the European Security Strategy or the design of a novel strategy** <sup>(80)</sup>.

## 3.2. The EU as a bilateral actor

### 3.2.1. Foundations and capacities

Apart from its multilateral activities, the EU has always been a bilateral actor <sup>(81)</sup>: to give but one example, the Union institutionalised bilateral relations with Canada as early as 1976 with a framework agreement on economic cooperation <sup>(82)</sup>. It must be observed, however, that its multilateral activities

<sup>(77)</sup> [https://unfccc.int/meetings/durban\\_nov\\_2011/meeting/6245.php](https://unfccc.int/meetings/durban_nov_2011/meeting/6245.php)

<sup>(78)</sup> Torney, D., *European Climate Diplomacy: Building capacity for external action*, Briefing Paper 141, The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Helsinki, 2013.

<sup>(79)</sup> MERCURY project, op.cit., 2012.

<sup>(80)</sup> Drieskens, E., and Van Schaik, L. (eds.), *The EU and effective multilateralism: external and internal reform*, Routledge, London and New York, 2014.

<sup>(81)</sup> Hassan, O., *Mapping Bilateralism*, EU-GRASP Working Paper No 3, 2010 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(82)</sup> <http://eeas.europa.eu/canada/>

have regularly been emphasised more strongly, especially in the early 2000s. In more recent years, observers witness an opposite trend, with the EU overtly seeking bilateral agreements (e.g. on trade and investment and in the face of the, so far, inconclusive global trade negotiations mentioned above), and building ‘strategic partnerships’ around key issues with regions and countries across the globe. Already, the 2003 European Security Strategy called for such partnerships with the United States, Russia, China or India. The 2008 report on its implementation emphasised then the need for (bilateral) ‘partnerships for effective multilateralism’, without providing direction on how the bilateral and the multilateral dimension should go together <sup>(83)</sup>. **This also implies that the concept of strategic partnership itself has tended to be under-conceptualised by the EU, and that the choice for its partners may not have been based on clearly identifiable criteria.** Academics have tried to fill this void with various classification attempts. If one adopts the definition of foreign policy introduced above, namely that it is politics aimed at influencing others, **strategic partnerships ‘are those that are pursued consistently over time, keeping the bar straight through the ups and downs of respective relationships’** <sup>(84)</sup>. In other words, they provide a stable framework for relations over the long term, in which structured interaction with partners — even in case of diverging opinions — remains possible. While allowing for hands-on, direct cooperation, the partnerships also have the objective of feeding effectively into global multilateral governance.

The EU’s capacities for bilateral actions are, at first sight, very solid: as an economic heavyweight, and despite the financial and economic crisis, the Union represents an attractive market power <sup>(85)</sup>. Also beyond the economic sphere, it is sought as a key interlocutor, given its strong internal legal regime and the willingness of external partners to engage in coordinated action and joint problem-solving on many issues (e.g. related to sustainable development). **When it comes to coordination of and external representation in bilateral affairs, the precise format of EU action depends very much on issue areas,** but both tasks are often assumed by the EEAS since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty. However, the President of the European Council has also played an important role in coordinating EU efforts and representing the EU: together with the Commission President and the High Representative, the President forms the Troika that represents the Union vis-à-vis key interlocutors at the highest political level (e.g. at the usually annual summits). At lower echelons, the cooperation between the EEAS and various Commission services is equally essential, albeit not always functioning very well. The coordination task that the EEAS has to perform is thus challenging. In the Service itself, ‘the flow of information between geographic and thematic divisions is not systematic’ either, even if many horizontal matters such as climate change have a bearing for all partnerships <sup>(86)</sup>. Cooperation between the EU and the Member States in dealing with strategic partners has also been described as generally ‘loose’, while it seems to be functioning better on the ground. Staff at EU delegations in the capitals of strategic partner countries (e.g. Washington DC and Beijing) are said to regularly have good working relations with their counterparts in the Member State embassies around specific topics (e.g. trade) <sup>(87)</sup>.

---

<sup>(83)</sup> Grevi, G., ‘The EU Strategic Partnerships: Process and Purposes’, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU’s Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 161, 159–174 [GR:EEN].

<sup>(84)</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>(85)</sup> Damro, *op. cit.*, 2012 [MERCURY].

<sup>(86)</sup> Grevi, *op. cit.*, 2013, 171 [GR:EEN].

<sup>(87)</sup> *Ibid.*

### 3.2.2. Activities and outcomes

The EU is engaged in bilateral relations with numerous countries, regions, international organisations, and it has been claimed that it was party to 649 bilateral treaties in 2011 <sup>(88)</sup>. When it comes to bilateral ‘strategic partnerships’, the EU is, however, comparatively speaking, a latecomer. Since the late 1990s, it has set up such partnerships with 10 key countries (Brazil, Canada, China, India, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea and the United States) and with regions (especially Latin America). Its delay in forging such partnerships may be due to the fact that they ‘cover two dimensions in which the EU has traditionally been quite ineffective, that is a strategic approach to foreign policy and bilateral relations with other powers’ <sup>(89)</sup>. Out of the 10 partnerships, those with the United States and the BRICs (Brazil, Russia, India, China) are considered as essential or pivotal. Emphasis is therefore placed here on the United States and the economically and demographically most important BRIC, China, before briefly touching upon inter-regional forms of bilateralism.

#### *The EU and the United States of America*

With the United States, the EU maintains bilateral relations that date back to the 1950s and were formalised through the 1990 Transatlantic Declaration, the 1995 New Transatlantic Agenda, the 1998 Transatlantic Economic Partnership, and the creation of the Transatlantic Economic Council in 2007. Although the EU may not be able to rival the United States in terms of military capacities, its economic standing means that it encounters the United States on an equal footing in just about any issue area in global affairs. And even if the turn toward the Pacific that the Obama administration displayed from its very start indicated a decline in importance of the EU from a US perspective, the two remain interdependent and thus closely tied. **Despite this interdependence and the oft-cited ‘shared transatlantic values’, the EU and the United States do tend to disagree on many matters, ranging from the necessity or not to intervene militarily in states across the globe (e.g. Iraq) to the set-up of the International Criminal Court, environmental policy, the regulation of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) or, most recently, data protection concerns.** Several of these topics merit detailed discussion.

At this point, the major and most mediatised bilateral engagement between the United States and the EU concerns the area of **trade**, with the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP) currently under negotiation. Together, the EU and the United States account for more than 45 % of world GDP and one third of world trade <sup>(90)</sup>. Since many trade barriers have already been removed in the past, the two partners essentially seek a further harmonisation of their regulatory standards, which proves difficult. An example of this difficulty is the highly mediatised refusal of some EU Member States to grant market access to US hormone-treated beef and chlorinated chicken, but contentious issues are much more wide-ranging. They include differences over financial services, investor protection and fracking, and have sparked public debates about the desirability of this partnership.

<sup>(88)</sup> Emerson et al., op. cit., 2011, 3.

<sup>(89)</sup> Renard, T., *The Treachery of Strategies: A Call for True EU Strategic Partnerships*, Egmont Paper 45, Egmont Institute, Brussels, 2011, 1.

<sup>(90)</sup> EEAS, *EU-US Summit* (Brussels, 26 March 2014) and *EU-US relations*, Fact Sheet, EEAS, Brussels, 2.

**EU-US relations on trade have, however, to be understood in a much broader context: ‘the myriad challenges currently confronting the West cannot be addressed via trade deals alone’** <sup>(91)</sup>. Rather, EU-US relations are crucial to the shape of global governance more broadly. This is true for the economic and financial sphere, discussed above with regard to the G20. In this area, the challenge for the EU is to balance a possible G2 dominance of the United States and China. It is also true for the **security** domain, for example, where the absence of a fully fledged European defence policy also entails that the EU regularly counts on the United States to step in when crisis situations arise. Yet, US military resources are finite, and are increasingly invested elsewhere than in the European neighbourhood, putting pressure on the EU for the ‘burden-sharing’ demanded by the United States in the framework of NATO.

**Climate change** represents another key challenge that the two sides face, and which neither of them can tackle alone. The EU-US relationship has long been at the heart of the global efforts to deal with this issue. Where EU Member States and the United States were crucial to the deal struck on the UN framework convention in 1992, the EU, the United States and Japan were essential to delivering the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. During the Bush administration (2001–09), however, the United States largely disengaged from climate politics, and also kept EU-US bilateral relations around climate issues to a minimum <sup>(92)</sup>. Things partially changed when Barack Obama took office. Bilateral relations around climate change and energy were stepped up again, and the creation of the EU-US Energy Council in 2009 marked a first tangible output. In spite of this cooperation, EU-US relations have not, however, positively contributed to ‘effective multilateralism’ in the global climate regime over the past few years. **In no small measure, this has to do with deeply rooted and contrasting perceptions on the two sides of the Atlantic of the threat that climate change poses: the European approach based on the precautionary principle contrasts with a US confidence in technological progress allowing for cost-effective emissions reductions** <sup>(93)</sup>.

Besides the need to conceive of them broadly in thematic terms, it is also important to regard EU-US relations as embedded into a specific geostrategic context. One interesting recent research strand in this regard, embodied by the ATLANTIC FUTURE project, and fuelled by political processes to provide an alternative to the rise of the Pacific <sup>(94)</sup>, looks at the dynamics between the north and south on both shores of the Atlantic. This project promises to deliver a precise mapping of the overlapping and complementary relations between all the Atlantic parties in issue areas ranging from economic and energy to security and environmental policies. It will also comprise a prospective exercise where future scenarios for the Atlantic space will be outlined. This should lay the grounds on which to decide whether pan-Atlantic political initiatives, encompassing the EU-US relations, will be a viable component of future global governance <sup>(95)</sup>.

<sup>(91)</sup> Menon, A., ‘Time for Tough Love in Transatlantic Relations’, *The International Spectator*, 2013, 48(3): 7–14, 7.

<sup>(92)</sup> Ellerman, D., *The Shifting Locus of Global Climate Policy Leadership*, TRANSWORLD Working Paper No 16, 2013 [TRANSWORLD].

<sup>(93)</sup> De Cock, G., *Contrasting the US’ and the EU’s Approach to Climate Security*, EU-GRASP Working Paper No 17, 2010 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(94)</sup> Such as the Atlantic Basin Initiative (<http://transatlantic.sais-jhu.edu/events/2012/Atlantic%20Basin%20Initiative/Atlantic%20Basin%20Initiative>).

<sup>(95)</sup> See the website of the FP7 project ATLANTIC FUTURE on this matter (<http://www.atlanticfuture.eu/>).

**In sum, EU-US relations have remained strong in economic, especially trade, terms over the years, but were characterised by periodic rifts and continued disagreements on value grounds regarding issues such as security, food safety or environmental protection.** While the transatlantic dialogue is open, it is an unresolved question whether this cooperation also feeds into the second objective of strategic partnerships, which is to forge more solid multilateral cooperation. The insights of the ongoing TRANSWORLD project can be expected to provide further clarity on this. A key objective of this project is to uncover the dynamics of the evolving EU-US relations in light of three competing hypotheses: (i) the relations evolve toward a structural drift; (ii) the two parties establish a purely functional relationship; and (iii) they form an enduring partnership. The EU's future strategy, whether in the T-TIP negotiations specifically or toward other major actors (especially China) and within the G20 in general, will strongly co-determine the shape that the transatlantic relationship will take.

### *The EU and China*

China's ascent from being the most populous country and 'factory of the world' to becoming the second largest economy on the planet has been comparatively rapid, and has come with important socioecological challenges. China not only displays growing ambitions to be recognised as a regional and global player, but has also an immense energy need to sustain its model of economic growth. Moreover, it is building up significant military resources. All this has major repercussions for global politics. It has also significantly contributed to making relations with China gradually move centre stage in the EU. Even if efforts to intensify the engagement with China date back to at least the 1970s, it is really only in the past decade that they have been stepped up. A strategic partnership was initiated in 2003, based on the 1985 EU-China trade and cooperation agreement. It gradually led to a strong institutionalisation of bilateral relations, with political, economic and dozens of sectoral dialogues (on issues from trade to human rights) and yearly EU-China summits<sup>(96)</sup>. After an initial phase of high promise for this relationship, the late 2000s came with a number of persistent conflicts (especially around human rights, but also trade issues) and an attempt at reinvigoration in more recent years. To explore EU-China relations, three important domains will be briefly examined: global economic, climate and security governance.

Given the size of their respective economies, EU-China relations are crucial to the global **economic and trade** system. **The EU has been the most important trading partner for China since 2004.** It has also played a key role in promoting China's accession to the WTO, using bilateral ties to integrate the country into the multilateral trade regime. Since China's WTO membership took effect in 2001, and especially since the EU's 2006 'Global Europe' strategy, the bilateral dimension has been further reinforced with a view to establishing a free trade agreement between the two parties. **Despite open channels for dialogue, the bilateral trade relations have also seen a number of conflicts in recent years.**

---

<sup>(96)</sup> The Dialogue Architecture of the EU-China Strategic Partnership can be found online ([http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu\\_china\\_dialogues\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/china/docs/eu_china_dialogues_en.pdf)).

**These rifts have touched upon, among other things, ‘restrictions on foreign direct investment, protection of intellectual property, forced technology transfer, lack of transparency regarding subsidies, export restrictions’** <sup>(97)</sup>. Most recently, fears of a ‘trade war’ arose around the EU’s intention to limit the import of Chinese solar panels due to alleged dumping, which China countered with a threat to impose restrictions on the import of wine from the EU. While this matter was settled through an ad hoc *entente*, the launch of negotiations of a comprehensive EU-China investment agreement in late 2013 sparked hopes for a more general agreement on trade issues and for a gradual rebalancing of the currently strong trade deficit to the disadvantage of the Union. The conflict cases show, however, that the **bilateral relations in the trade domain remain often arduous for the time being** <sup>(98)</sup>. **This trend is exacerbated by the parallel trade policies of EU Member States toward China** discussed in Section 3.1 <sup>(99)</sup>. This also implies that **EU efforts vis-à-vis China do not systematically result in effective multilateralism in the WTO** <sup>(100)</sup>.

**Climate change** is equally among the major topics dealt with in the EU-China Strategic Partnership. In 2005, the two sides concluded a specific climate change partnership. From the EU perspective, this was agreed in a twofold attempt: engaging in technology cooperation to effectively help China to reduce emissions and starting a bilateral dialogue with China to feed into the UN negotiations on climate change <sup>(101)</sup>. The outcome of these efforts is clearly ambiguous. On the one hand, the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit and its follow-up represented a downside for EU diplomacy and EU-China relations. The efforts that had been undertaken to rally China in the years before the summit had not fed into effective multilateral cooperation, given continued Chinese reluctance to commit to any binding emissions reductions on a global scale. On the contrary, a widespread perception was that China had sought to gain as many positive advances from the cooperation with the EU as it could, but had given little in return. Moreover, it had engaged in ‘venue-shopping’, concluding bilateral agreements with EU Member States alongside its engagement with the EU (represented by the Commission, especially the Directorate-General for the Environment and, later, the Directorate-General for Climate Action) per se, thus effectively trying to take advantage from Union divisions to advance its own interests. **From a strategic perspective, and if bilateralism was meant to feed into multilateralism, the climate change partnership has thus delivered very little up to now** <sup>(102)</sup>. The promises made by China and the other BASIC countries in the 2011 Durban agreement, namely to negotiate an outcome with legal force including developed and (major) developing countries, are yet to be fulfilled. On the other hand, the **bilateral technological cooperation between China and the EU has solidified over time**, for example through agreements on practical cooperation regarding the set-up of

<sup>(97)</sup> Armstrong, J., *The EU’s Trade Policy and China: Cooperation in the Interest of Multilateralism?*, MERCURY E-paper No 21, 2012 [MERCURY].

<sup>(98)</sup> Casarini, N., *The EU-China partnership: 10 years on*, European Institute for Security Studies, Paris, 2013.

<sup>(99)</sup> Youngs and Springford, op. cit., 2013.

<sup>(100)</sup> Armstrong, op. cit., 2012, 22.

<sup>(101)</sup> Belis, D., and Schunz, S., ‘Global Climate Governance and the Energy Challenge: European and Chinese Perspectives’, in Defraigne, J., Defraigne, P., de Wilde, T., and Wouters, J. (eds.), *China, the EU and the Restructuring of Global Governance*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham, 2012, 201–214.

<sup>(102)</sup> Romano, G., *The EU-China Partnership on Climate Change: Bilateralism Begetting Multilateralism in Promoting a Climate Change Regime?*, MERCURY E-paper No 8, 2010 [MERCURY].

emissions trading schemes in China or the sustainable management of cities more broadly <sup>(103)</sup>. Such cooperation based on small steps may also be the way to move forward for the bilateral relationship, given continued dissonances on the general approach to dealing with climate change.

In the area of **security**, global crises that emerged in recent years, be it the military operation in Libya in 2011 or the case of Syria, demonstrated that ‘China and European countries found themselves at odds’ on a regular basis <sup>(104)</sup>. **Dissonances result from structural problems that have to do with different perceptions of security and how it should be pursued.** As the EU-GRASP project has comprehensively studied, the EU operates with a broad understanding of security, with a strong emphasis on non-traditional security threats and the notion of human security <sup>(105)</sup>. What is more, in military terms, and despite the objective to develop a common security and defence policy, the Union has currently no unified defence policy apart from NATO. By contrast, China’s view on security is narrower. Its main objective has been to protect its own sovereignty and role in the UN Security Council, and to act as a regional power in the Asia-Pacific. At the same time, it has increased its military spending by 170 % since 2002, occupying second place behind the United States in this regard <sup>(106)</sup>. Added to these divergences of perception is the continued dissonance over the arms embargo that the EU withholds against China since the 1989 ‘Tiananmen Square’ incidents. All this renders both bilateral security talks between the two players and the building into multilateral security governance rather complicated.

In synthesis, the cases of trade, environmental and security governance illustrate key features of the EU-China relations, as institutionalised in the strategic partnership, which form a pattern. This pattern comprises a **strong EU engagement with China, a multiplicity of dialogues, but also continued misunderstandings between the two partners** <sup>(107)</sup>. **Added to this is the trend toward an asymmetrical form of bilateralism, where EU-China and individual EU Member State-China relations coexist.** If one adds other domains (e.g. human rights) to the picture, this overall impression is further confirmed. This is not to imply that the strategic partnership is without positive effects regarding trust- and capacity-building. Its tangible outputs, especially in terms of a contribution to multilateralism, have, however, remained limited so far.

### ***The EU and other regions***

On top of relations with key third countries, the Union’s bilateral activities vis-à-vis other regions merit brief discussion. Inter- (or bi-)regionalism has become a major research topic in parallel to the

<sup>(103)</sup> On this, see the FP7 project URBACHINA (*Sustainable Urbanisation in China — Historical and Comparative Perspectives, Mega-trends towards 2050*, 2011–15).

<sup>(104)</sup> Zhemin, C., ‘The Efficacy of Post-Lisbon Treaty EU’s External Actions and China-EU Strategic Partnership’, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU’s Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 181, [GREEN].

<sup>(105)</sup> See, for example, Lucarelli, S., Van Langenhove, L., and Wouters, J. (eds.), *The EU and multilateral security governance*, Routledge, London, 2013 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(106)</sup> Le Gloannec, A.-M., Irondelle, B., and Cadier, D., *New and Evolving Trends in International Security*, TRANSWORLD Working Paper 13, 2013, 13–14 [TRANSWORLD].

<sup>(107)</sup> Wacker, G., ‘China und die EU: Keine Strategie, keine Partnerschaft’, in Lang, K.-O., and Wacker, G. (eds.), *Die EU im Beziehungsgefüge großer Staaten*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin, 2013, 29–40.

Union's efforts to build strong and strategic partnerships with other areas of the world<sup>(108)</sup>. While it has long formed part of the Union's strategy, a proliferation of inter-regional relations has been observed since the 1990s and interpreted as part of the 'EU's specific strategic response to the new global system'<sup>(109)</sup>. However, the EU's discourse surrounding them initially remained rather 'blind to the outside world and stubbornly self-referential', notably by attempting to promote the Union as a model of regional integration<sup>(110)</sup>. In more recent years, inter-regional relations involving the EU were expanded and can be described as a 'mixed bag' both in thematic and geographical terms. For one, they have tended to be developed around either specific issues (trade, aid) or as a more horizontal effort covering global politics more widely<sup>(111)</sup>. Depending on the issues at hand, the key service in charge on the EU side is either the EEAS or the European Commission's Directorate-General for Trade or Directorate-General for Development and Cooperation. What is more, the geographic outreach of these partnerships is ever broader: there are numerous exchanges between the EU and Africa (e.g. African Union), Asia (e.g. ASEAN) or Latin America (e.g. Mercosur), and a strategic partnership has been formed with CELAC, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States. This partnership covers a vast array of issues: while economic relations are at its heart, it deals also with migration, human rights, education, science and cultural issues as well as environmental policies. Research on this partnership has, especially beyond economic relations, so far been scarce. It may gain in importance in the coming years, with reinforced emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of the exchange between the EU and CELAC<sup>(112)</sup>. **As it stands, the mixed bag of inter-regionalism as a bilateral EU foreign policy tool is 'still lacking a constructive and consistent narrative'**<sup>(113)</sup>. **Although it does allow for structured exchanges with partners on all continents, the effectiveness of such cooperation in terms of policy outputs and effects on effective multilateralism is often not evident**<sup>(114)</sup>.

**In conclusion, if the EU is thus increasingly a bilateral player via its strategic partnerships, these latter remain 'work in progress' with a 'very uneven' output**<sup>(115)</sup>.

The key dimension of these partnerships is regular economic exchanges, but other issues are added to the picture, depending on the EU's interlocutor. While the concept, its utility and implementation are contested among EU institutions and Member States, and while the choice of additional partners appears to remain open, strategic partnerships do seem to provide the long-term framework for structured exchanges that observers have lauded. Whether they can systematically feed into an overarching EU strategy aimed at effective multilateralism is far from clear, however, since 'in interactions with strategic partners and other regional organisations the EU also takes a mixed

<sup>(108)</sup> This section draws on the comprehensive study by Ponjaert, F., 'Inter-regionalism as a Coherent and Intelligible Instrument in the EU Foreign Policy Toolbox: A Comparative Assessment', in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 135–153 [GR:EEN].

<sup>(109)</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>(110)</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>(111)</sup> Rignér, H., and Söderbaum, F., *Mapping Inter-regionalism*, EU-GRASP Working Paper No 4, 2010 [EU-GRASP].

<sup>(112)</sup> See Societal Challenge 6, 'Europe in a Changing World: Inclusive, Innovative and Reflective Societies', Work Programme 2014/15.

<sup>(113)</sup> Ponjaert, op. cit., 2013, 157 [GR:EEN].

<sup>(114)</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>(115)</sup> Grevi, op. cit., 2013, 173 [GR:EEN].

approach — multilateral in ambition, highly pragmatic in practice' <sup>(116)</sup>. What all this means for the EU's position in the global order is discussed in the next section.

### 3.3. Situating the EU in the contemporary global order

Situating the EU in the contemporary world order represents a major challenge, tackled implicitly or explicitly by numerous research projects, including those discussed in this Review. If one adopts a state-oriented perspective, this task boils down to the question of whether the EU can be, or is, one of the poles in the supposedly multipolar system. From a broader perspective, adopting the view of non-polarity and global governance, one may ask what functional role the EU precisely plays in this system. These questions will be addressed here in two steps: first, by interpreting the empirical record discussed in the previous sections; second, by examining how other, non-European actors see the EU.

#### 3.3.1. The contingency of the EU's significance as a global actor

**The research results presented so far underscore that, although EU demography may be in decline, and although the EU may not yet have fully surmounted its economic and financial crises, it holds undoubtedly a strong potential for global actorness.** This is based on both its diplomatic capacities and its material resources. Yet, whether it can convert this potential into impact as a global player is an altogether different matter. The discussed research has shown that the EU is a very eclectic player, often highly ambitious and normative in rhetoric, but, to say it in the words of the MERCURY project, '... has conflicting strategies and priorities. It embraces inter-regional dialogue. It seeks strategic partnerships with great powers. It vigorously defends European interests within international organisations. Its Member States do not share a single understanding of, or approach to, multilateralism' <sup>(117)</sup>. A similar judgement emerges from the above discussion of its bilateral activities. This also implies that **the EU appears, to the observer, as a global actor in search of a strategy. What is more, and partially as a result of this search for a strategy, even if it is highly active in many areas, the Union is not always so effective.**

Based on these observations, **the EU's significance as a global actor seems to be highly contingent: the EU is pivotal both as a multilateral and bilateral player to some areas, not central but important in other domains, and in risk of relative irrelevance in still other areas. It all depends on opportunities and context.** In economic and financial global governance, the EU can generally be considered a pole in the global order, alongside the United States, Japan and the BRICs <sup>(118)</sup>. With regard to other policy domains, one would, however, rather need to scrutinise the exact roles played by the EU in a given context. As a multilateral actor,

<sup>(116)</sup> MERCURY project, op. cit., 2012, 3.

<sup>(117)</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>(118)</sup> Nye, J., *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2013, 213.

the EU can play a leading or mediating role in areas where its strong normative commitments and experience as multilateral player can weigh, such as in the environmental domain, but it finds its limits in areas that demand greater internal unity and in which global debates tend to be highly complex and/or politicised (e.g. security, human rights issues) <sup>(119)</sup>. As a bilateral actor, the Union is very selective and not regularly so effective. Although it can rely on its market power vis-à-vis key players in various world regions, this power is not systematically converted into impact.

While its attractiveness for its immediate neighbourhood has not been scrutinised here, but seems to have come under severe strain both in the wake of the Arab Spring and through the recent competition with Russia around the development of several countries of the Eastern Partnership, emerging powers still look to the EU for a variety of reasons. China in particular seeks bilateral cooperation to counterbalance the United States in a select number of issues areas. Other players, as illustrated by the EU-CELAC cooperation, look to the EU for joint solutions to pressing global problems, for example in the area of sustainability. And while the competition on the African continent with countries like China or Brazil is intensifying, the EU seems to continue being capable of effectively negotiating with South Africa and other African states around issues of interest to them.

A look at the literature on external perceptions of the EU confirms these findings.

### 3.3.2. How others see the EU as a global actor

A precondition for effective foreign policy activity of any actor is its recognition by others. If the EU is perceived as a global actor which legitimately represents the interests or norms of a recognised political community, its chances for attaining its objectives in interaction with third parties are considerably enhanced. One expression of this recognition is the granting of a legal status to the European Union in multilateral forums, as discussed above. Beyond this legal recognition, however, the acceptance of the EU as a global actor and its place in the contemporary global order depend on the perceptions and judgements of third parties. An expanding strand of research has therefore also focussed on ‘how others see the EU’, whereby these others include political (politicians, diplomats), business or civil society elites, media representatives or public opinion across all continents <sup>(120)</sup>. The main conclusions of this research are the following <sup>(121)</sup>.

- In their synthesis of **public opinion research** covering a range of issues (from environment to human rights) and several continents (with country studies of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, India, Japan and South Africa), researchers from GARNET generally noted that **the EU is a little**

<sup>(119)</sup> When making this statement, one has to bear in mind that some areas of multilateral activities were scrutinised neither in the projects, nor in this Review.

<sup>(120)</sup> To understand these actors’ perceptions, extensive interviews, surveys and document research (including of school textbooks) was conducted. Also, researchers have widely interpreted suitable existing data sources (e.g. World Value Survey, Afrobarometer).

<sup>(121)</sup> Apart from the FP7 projects GARNET, EUROROADMAP and CHINESEVIEWSOFEU, other projects have made contributions to this research strand, including ‘The European Union in the Eyes of Asia’ (<http://www.euperceptions.canterbury.ac.nz/eyes/index.shtml>) and ‘Asian Perceptions of the EU: External views on the EU as a Civilian Power — India and China in Comparison’, funded by the German Ministry of Education and Research.

- known and little debated actor** in all these countries <sup>(122)</sup>. Many non-Europeans do not seem to be well informed about the Union, and those who are do not seem to think that it is a very effective global player. At the same time, CHINESEVIEWSOFEU found that an overwhelming majority of Chinese citizens have a positive attitude toward, and perception of, the EU <sup>(123)</sup>. Similar results were found for Japan and Korea, while the findings for Russia were more mitigated <sup>(124)</sup>.
- When it comes to **elite surveys** of an even broader range of countries, the judgement is more nuanced and slightly more to the advantage of the EU. Although ‘across the globe, political elites hold serious doubts about the effectiveness and credibility of the EU as a “new type” of global actor’ <sup>(125)</sup>, they do have numerous positive observations about the Union.
    - ▶ **The EU is (still) often perceived as an economic and trade giant.** For example, business elites and the press in Brazil, India, Mexico and South Africa regarded the EU as a major economic power prior to the euro area crisis <sup>(126)</sup>. This view seems, at least in India, to have suffered through the crisis <sup>(127)</sup>. At the same time, Chaban and Holland find that ‘in the eyes of Asia, the EU still possesses a sufficient potential to remain relevant and capable in certain areas (specifically, trade/economy and science/research)’ <sup>(128)</sup>. This finding is supported by CHINESEVIEWSOFEU research, which observed that ‘Chinese elite groups (...) saw the EU as being more important than China not only in terms of its impact on the international economy, but also in world politics. The EU is ranked as the No 2 global power’ after the United States <sup>(129)</sup>.
    - ▶ This judgement also stems from the fact that the **EU is regularly seen as a supporter of multilateralism, global governance and sustainability**, notably on the African continent <sup>(130)</sup>.
    - ▶ Finally, and also predominantly in Africa, the **EU is still often regarded as a model of regional integration**.
  - This latter view in particular is, however, not uncontested. **Third country elites** regularly criticise the following dimensions of the EU’s activity as a global actor <sup>(131)</sup>.

<sup>(122)</sup> Cerutti, F., and Lucarelli, S. (eds.), *The Search for a European Identity: values, policies and legitimacy of the European Union*, 2008 [GARNET]; Sun, L., *Chinese public and elites’ views of the EU: implications for EU’s China policy*, Working Paper, 2011 [CHINESEVIEWSOFEU].

<sup>(123)</sup> Dekker, H., and van der Noll, J., *Chinese citizens’ attitudes towards the European Union and their origins*, Working Paper, 2011 [CHINESEVIEWSOFEU].

<sup>(124)</sup> See the contributions to *Baltic Journal of European Studies*, 2013, Vol. 3(3).

<sup>(125)</sup> Fioramonti, L., and Lucarelli, S., ‘Conclusion: self-representations and external perceptions — Can the EU bridge the gap?’, in Lucarelli, S., and Fioramonti, L. (eds.), *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*, Routledge, London, 2010, 218–225 [GARNET].

<sup>(126)</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>(127)</sup> Lisbonne-de Vergeron, K., *L’Europe vue de Chine et d’Inde depuis la crise: nouvelles perspectives des grands émergents asiatiques*, Fondation Schuman, Paris, 2012.

<sup>(128)</sup> This observation is based on a study of quality media reports in seven Asian countries on the EU before and during the crisis: Chaban, N., and Holland, M., ‘Assuming Superpower Status? Evolving Asian Perceptions of the EU’, *L’Espace Politique*, 2013.

<sup>(129)</sup> Sun, *op. cit.*, 2011, 5 [CHINESEVIEWSOFEU].

<sup>(130)</sup> Sicurelli, D., ‘Regional partners? Perceptions and criticisms at the African Union’, in Lucarelli, S., and Fioramonti, L. (eds.), *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*, Routledge, London, 2010, 180–194 [GARNET].

<sup>(131)</sup> Lucarelli/Fioramonti, *op. cit.*, 2008; *op. cit.*, 2010 [GARNET]; Grasland, C., Didelon, C., and Beauguitte, L., Synthesis report, 2011 [EUROBROADMAP].

- ▶ Many of them **point to the EU's problematic lack of internal unity and its Eurocentric attitude** <sup>(132)</sup>. This perception has arguably been reinforced during the euro area crisis <sup>(133)</sup>. It is emblematically voiced in the following statement by Vaisse and Kundnani: 'As a conflicted and divided Europe drifted towards economic stagnation and political gridlock, so the model for which the EU stands — that of an expanding and ever more effective multilateralism as a solution to the problems of a globalised world — was also discredited in the eyes of others. Emerging powers such as Brazil and China understandably wondered why they should pay to help rescue a continent which is proving unable to get its act together even though it has the resources to do so — let alone why they should listen to its lectures about regionalism and good governance' <sup>(134)</sup>. Nonetheless, and in line with public opinion in China, Chinese elites still believe that the EU will fully overcome the crisis and continue to play a major global role <sup>(135)</sup>.
- ▶ Closely linked to the Eurocentrism perceived by many external observers, the **EU is often reproached to be hypocritical, with clear contradictions between words and deeds** <sup>(136)</sup>. Importantly, it is seen as a protectionist power, which does not systematically act by its own standards, especially in the trade and developmental fields. This view is particularly pronounced among non-governmental organisations and in developing countries.

What implications can one draw from the major findings of this strand of research for the EU's place in the contemporary global order?

- **First and foremost**, a clear-cut, generalisable answer does not emerge from this literature. If one were to make a single relatively general observation, it would be that the EU appears to remain an attractive partner for many, especially emerging, countries <sup>(137)</sup>. For example, Chinese elites and public opinion in particular still see the EU as potential pole in a multipolar system, and thus as a global actor of significance. Other than that, however, **the perception of the place the EU occupies in global affairs seems to be issue-specific and dependent on context** <sup>(138)</sup>. **In areas related to trade and economics, the EU is, according to both elites and public opinion, still a strong actor. In other domains, notably those where the EU defends a normative agenda** (e.g. environmental, human rights policies), **it is recognised as trying to be a lead global player, but is often perceived as rather ineffective**. This twofold observation also leads to a paradox in terms of how 'likeable' the EU comes across. A key finding of the perception-based research is that in those fields of global affairs where the EU has a positive external image (e.g. in many multilateral bodies), it is de

<sup>(132)</sup> Hanau Santini, R., Mauriello, R., and Trombetta, L., 'Taking the lead: EU mediation role assessed by Iran and Lebanon', in Lucarelli, S., and Fioramonti, L. (eds.), *External Perceptions of the European Union as a Global Actor*, Routledge, London, 2010, 52–69 [GARNET].

<sup>(133)</sup> Lisbonne-de Vergeron, op. cit., 2012.

<sup>(134)</sup> Vaisse, J., and Kundnani, H., *European Foreign Policy Scorecard 2012*, European Council on Foreign Relations, Brussels, 5, 2012.

<sup>(135)</sup> Lisbonne-de Vergeron, op. cit., 2012.

<sup>(136)</sup> Grasland/Didelon/Beauguitte, op. cit., 2011 [EUROBROADMAP].

<sup>(137)</sup> See also Lang, K.-O., and Wacker, G., *Die EU im Beziehungsgefüge großer Staaten*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), Berlin, 2013.

<sup>(138)</sup> Chaban/Holland, op. cit., 2013; Delcour, op. cit., 2011, 4 [EUROBROADMAP].

facto a less effective actor. By contrast, in areas where the Union has greater (also externally recognised) potential and occasionally manages to convert its power into results, like in the area of trade, its activities as a global actor carry a rather negative image, ‘tainted with selfishness and short-sightedness’ <sup>(139)</sup>.

- **Second, the** (perception of the) **EU’s place in the world seems to have** suffered from the crisis: **where public opinion and, to a lesser extent, elites showed a tendency toward indifference about the EU before the euro area crisis, there is now a trend to perceive the Union slightly more negatively.** More concretely, the EU’s foreign policy capabilities are perceived to be in decline, enhancing the gap with its external ambitions <sup>(140)</sup>.
- **Third, the EU’s place is diminished by the fact that it is recognised as a composite actor:** many external actors are very aware of tensions within the EU, and practically also play on these divisions to obtain privileged relations with individual Member States.

So while it is difficult to establish the Union’s position in the world in general terms, the research on EU multi- and bilateral foreign policy activities *and* on how others perceive the EU seem to point to the necessity to scrutinise specific issue areas. In some of these areas, notably the environmental sphere, the Union is, indeed, a key actor, perceived as such and credited with a positive image. In other areas, it is a key actor, but with a negative image (e.g. trade policies). Finally, in some domains, it is arguably not a central player at all (e.g. in many security-related domains).

---

<sup>(139)</sup> Fioramonti/Lucarelli, op. cit., 2010, 223 [GARNET].

<sup>(140)</sup> Chaban/Holland, op. cit., 2013; Zimmermann, H., ‘Weltmacht EU? Die Folgen der Eurokrise für die globale Stellung der EU’, *Zeitschrift für Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik*, 2013, 6: 109–123.

## 4. Policy implications: the EU's future as a global actor



The conceptual discussions and research findings presented up to this point touch upon issues of high societal and political relevance: in a rapidly changing world, the EU's evolving role as a global actor continues to be subject of debates and critical scrutiny. The importance of these debates becomes clear when one considers that the effectiveness with which the EU defends its interests and values externally also co-determines its legitimacy as a political project. For that reason, extracting policy implications from the research findings marks the final objective of this Review. Although the broad array of findings about the EU as a global actor could only be presented very synthetically here, it provides the foundations for a set of evidence-based policy recommendations. These are preceded by a brief summary of the key insights and an outlook to the future by way of scenario-building.

#### 4.1. Key policy-relevant insights: the EU's eclectic foreign policy

The key insights about the EU as a global player synthesised in this Review can be summarised as follows.

- **Uncertainty about the emerging world order is the main structuring feature of global politics at this point in time.** The transformative process that the global system is undergoing can take a very long time and demands **adaptive capacities of all foreign policy players** — traditional (state) actors and non-traditional players such as the EU.
- **If the EU's adaptive capacities are thus put to the test, its record is decidedly mixed: while it has maintained its long-standing commitment to multilateralism, many forms of multilateralism coexist. As a multilateral player, it is perceived as a generally positive, but often ineffective global actor.**
- **In its bilateral relations, the EU regularly lacks coherence, targeting actors in highly divergent ways. While tailor-made strategies can be an advantage, there seems to be no overarching 'grand strategy'.** Moreover, whereas in some areas the EU does prove to be successful in promoting its interests, values and goals, notably when using its 'trade muscle', this results often in quite negative reactions from third countries. This is especially the case when the EU lets its own interests prevail over the quest for mutual benefits.
- Taken together, its multilateral and bilateral approaches vis-à-vis the wider world add up to a **rather eclectic mix of foreign policy tools, with little strategic thought on issue-linkages.** This makes the EU's moves often very predictable to external partners, which — from a strategic perspective — can place a burden on its effectiveness.
- **As a consequence, the EU's place in the evolving global system as well as its own understanding of what this place is and realistically should be seem to be in flux.** This is also how the Union's situation is perceived by external actors, who view it as possessing high potential in economic terms and as very active as a multilateral diplomat, but as weak, without a clear strategy and without real impact in some crucial domains, notably security.

Based on these insights, which constitute medium-term trends of EU foreign policy, one can think about what the future *may* hold for the Union, before turning to what it *should* hold.

## 4.2. Scenarios for the future: Europe's role in the world in 2030

From what precedes, one can extrapolate several scenarios about how the EU might develop as a global actor in the future. As for the entire Review, the objective here is also to situate the EU in its broader context, taking account of both internal and external parameters of its foreign policy. Three conditions seem to be of key significance for its future place in the global system: the evolution of this global system itself, the development of the Union's capacities, and its credibility as a global actor. To bring these three aspects together, two scenario-building exercises are combined. At the global level, and drawing loosely on Gamble (GR:EEN), three scenarios are distinguished that focus on geopolitical considerations<sup>(141)</sup>. While the scenarios operate thus with notions of polarity, each scenario builds on assumptions about the role of state *and* non-state actors in global governance. At the EU level, another three scenarios are advanced which are inspired by the *Global Europe 2050* report<sup>(142)</sup>. Although that report takes 2050 as time horizon, the resulting combination between three possible world orders and three potential EU foreign policy trajectories represents a valid foresight exercise also for the medium-term future at the horizon of 2030.

Turning to the global level first, three scenarios of a future world order seem plausible.

- **Bipolar world order:** in this scenario, **the United States and China would settle into a G2 situation**, which will affect many policy fields, from trade to security. This bipolarity could be characterised by either a cold war-like atmosphere or, stressing the high degree of mutual dependence between the two players, by successive bilateral bargains. Other state and non-state players would have to position themselves in relation to these two heavyweights.
- **Multipolar world order with shared multilateral leadership in the G20:** this scenario implies the possibility of a reform of the multilateral global governance architecture as it stands and a rebalancing of power among multiple key actors, including the United States, China and the EU. This would provide the basis for a resolution of pressing global issues in the environmental, trade, finance or nuclear proliferation domain. While the current G20 members

<sup>(141)</sup> Gamble, A., 'The EU and the Evolving Shift of Power in Global Governance', in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 24, 15–26 [GR:EEN]. What is called 'world order' scenario in Table 2 refers only to the geopolitical dimension of Gamble's suggested scenarios, leaving the economic dimension aside. Moreover, a fourth scenario he entitles 'unipolar', and in which the United States would be the sole superpower, is not retained here.

<sup>(142)</sup> The *Global Europe 2050* report relates to EU research policy, but the scenarios are perfectly adaptable to the foreign policy context, as they are based on thorough analyses of the internal challenges the EU is faced with and different possible pathways for its reactions to these challenges ([http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/global-europe-2050-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/social-sciences/pdf/global-europe-2050-report_en.pdf)).

would form the core of this system, the input from other countries and non-state players would explicitly be sought in this scenario.

- **World order based on inter-regionalism:** in this scenario, the United States and China would be unable to play a leading role and the world would be divided into regional blocs, each with their own sphere of influence. **A more positive alternative trend could be the emergence of a global system of 'multilevel multilateralism' [which would] include regional and inter-regional governance as structural features, consistent and not conflicting with the global dimension'** <sup>(143)</sup>. In this latter variant, the growing number of non-state actors operating on the global scene would be fully implicated into the various levels of governance.

At the EU level, three scenarios can be identified that distinguish between the Union's credibility base, capacities, strategy and instruments.

- **'EU renaissance':** this scenario implies a **further strengthening of EU integration in the foreign policy domain**. The Union would recover from the euro area crisis and its repercussions, develop a foreign policy strategy that allows it to align ambitions and rhetoric with capabilities and activities, reinforce and employ a set of foreign policy instruments suited to the various problems it sets out to tackle. As a result, the EU would be considered as highly credible by its external interlocutors.
- **Business-as-usual:** this scenario would set forth trends in EU foreign policy detected in recent years. The Union would pursue **a hybrid approach based on bilateral and multilateral strategies, and often use foreign policy tools on an ad hoc basis and with mixed success**. Its external image and credibility would differ between issues areas and remain mitigated overall.
- **Decline of or disengagement from EU foreign policy:** with renationalisation trends in the wake of the euro area crisis, the motto for this scenario is 'every man for himself'. The EU's capacities would not be used to the full, no coherent strategy and instrument use could be adopted as Member States would conduct their own foreign policies. Third parties would engage in 'venue-shopping', looking for the best deals they can obtain from the Member States. The deadlock would manifest itself most visibly in the EEAS, which would become a non-operational bureaucracy. The EU's credibility as a global actor would be permanently impaired.

When combining these two sets of scenarios, several future options emerge (Table 2).

---

<sup>(143)</sup> Telò, op. cit., 2013, 62 [GR:EEN].

**Table 2. The EU's future as a global actor — nine scenarios**

<b>World order scenarios</b> <b>EU foreign policy scenarios</b>	<b>Bipolarity</b>	<b>Reformed multilateralism and G20 leadership</b>	<b>Inter-regionalism</b>
<b>EU foreign policy with high adaptive capacity</b>	<p><b>1 — Mediator</b></p> <p>In the context of US-China relations, the EU adopts a modus vivendi with both countries and tries to constructively play the role of a mediator wherever possible, while extending its own, regional sphere of influence.</p>	<p><b>4 — Global co-leader</b></p> <p>The EU manages to become a key pole co-shaping the new multilateral world order and positively integrating other, especially emerging, countries. Rules and practices develop that allow the EU to effectively deal with the other G20 members and to thus contribute in co-leadership to the solution of major global problems.</p>	<p><b>7 — Regional leader</b></p> <p>The EU successfully extends and positively shapes its sphere of influence in the immediate neighbourhood and emerges as a genuine regional leader. Beyond this region, competition between regional blocs is avoided and regional cooperation would form the nucleus for constructive inter-regionalism, in which the Union could export its values and experiences.</p>
<b>EU foreign policy under business-as-usual</b>	<p><b>2 — Muddling through</b></p> <p>The EU is incapable of adapting to the US-China dominance. While its global role risks declining in importance, it manages to regionally remain a relatively important player.</p>	<p><b>5 — Between co-leader and follower</b></p> <p>The EU is — by virtue of its economic power and via key Member States — part of the G20, but struggles to define its role in the body. Its efforts are mostly ad hoc, sometimes successful, but often just reactive to the agendas set by other players.</p>	<p><b>8 — Ad hoc regional (co-) leader</b></p> <p>Due to internal divergences and unsettled strategic questions, the EU attempts to, but does not fully succeed in assuming a regional leadership role. By virtue of its economic strength, it is sometimes able to co-lead the Euro-Mediterranean region, but at other moments its ambitions fail.</p>
<b>EU foreign policy in decline</b>	<p><b>3 — No significant role</b></p> <p>Each Member State tries to align with the United States and/or China to obtain preferential deals around issues of interest, while the EU's role as a global actor per se steeply declines in importance.</p>	<p><b>6 — No significant role</b></p> <p>Certain EU Member States which are — by virtue of their economic weight — part of the G20 do not systematically allow the EU-28 to be part of the game and try to exploit their privileged position. The EU's role as a global actor per se declines in importance.</p>	<p><b>9 — International organisation</b></p> <p>Member States use the EU as an arena to negotiate ad hoc deals that allow them to influence the immediate geographical sphere of influence and to withstand pressure from other regions. As a result, the EU functions as an international organisation without a genuine foreign policy.</p>

Source: Author's compilation based on Gamble, op. cit., 2013 [GR:EEN] and the *Global Europe 2050* report.

These scenarios come with a few caveats. They are ideal-types derived from two sets of scenarios. Reality may lie somewhere in between two (or more) scenarios and may be issue-specific and historically contingent. Not in the least, factors other than geopolitical and internal EU politics (e.g. major crises or conflicts) may co-determine the Union's evolution as a global actor. It is, therefore, also difficult to clearly point to one probable evolution, even for specific policy areas. Nonetheless, the scenarios provide for useful points of reference to structure the thinking about the present and future of EU foreign policy and address these three questions.

- *What has the EU achieved since it first formed its foreign policy?* This question has been answered in Section 3.3. It was argued that the EU can generally often be located in between scenarios 4 (Global co-leader), 5 (Between co-leader and follower), 7 (Regional leader) and 8 (Ad hoc (co-)regional leader), depending on issue areas.
- *What do current trends indicate regarding the direction the EU may evolve into in the nearer future?* If one sets existing trends forth, and based on the empirical evidence provided here, one may join Karen Smith in her assumption that **'for the foreseeable future, the EU will remain a key actor in international affairs in areas where its internal competence is strong or growing: trade, environmental policy (...). But in broader foreign, security and defence policy, it may find it more challenging to be a key reference point or important "player"'** <sup>(144)</sup>.
- *In which direction would one like to see the EU evolve in the medium-term future?* To tackle this crucial question, evidence-based normative reflections follow on the prospects of EU foreign policy, its opportunities and limits, and what it can or cannot do about these.

### 4.3. Policy recommendations: how the EU can be a durable part of global solutions

Policy recommendations are normative statements aimed at attaining certain policy objectives. The objective of this Review is to employ policy-relevant research insights to strengthen the role of the Union as a global actor. This implies transforming it into an effective player that successfully aggregates and defends EU values, interests and goals on the global scene. In the face of the evolving global system that has been documented in this Review, the Union has, in theory, three behavioural choices: it can strive to shape this system to fit its needs, it can disengage from it, or it can adapt to it. Disengagement is no valid option. In an interdependent world, an economic heavyweight like the EU can hardly exist in 'splendid isolation' in any domain of importance. Shaping the system should be an ultimate aspiration, but may hardly ever be attainable on a larger scale. This is a strategy the EU has pursued when attempting to export its regulatory frameworks in many domains. It continues to try this, but it has also realised its limits. And, therefore, the third option may appear as the most viable one. In other words, and referring to the scenarios introduced above, it is generally desirable that the EU manages to become, on a durable basis, a fully fledged

---

<sup>(144)</sup> Smith, op. cit., 2013, 115.

foreign policy player with a high adaptive capacity. Apart from how the world order evolves, this will allow the Union to be prepared to either — and this may well be the most favourable scenario (i.e. scenario 4) — co-lead global multilateral governance, contribute to a G2 situation (scenario 1), or at least maintain and consolidate its regional leadership role (scenario 7).

Any policy recommendation should therefore contribute to developing the preconditions for the EU to become a flexible foreign policy player. To this end, and based on the findings summarised so far, the following key recommendations may be given. They distinguish between the need for a sound (debate on an) overarching EU narrative for the 21st century <sup>(145)</sup>, the preparation and the execution of EU foreign policy.

#### 4.3.1. The need for an overarching strategic narrative

- **The EU should develop a clear strategic narrative based on straightforward principles that it can act upon. Such a narrative should transcend the notion of a 'security strategy' and cover the whole array of closely intertwined EU foreign policy matters, including trade. It needs to sketch out a credible European vision of global governance for the 21st century, which clearly articulates what the EU wants to achieve and with whom as well as how it can achieve its objectives — for its own benefit and that of the planet. This narrative needs to resonate with other players and has to be accepted as a valid vision of the (future) world order.**
- **The Union's narrative should be based on both internal and external considerations.** On the one hand, it needs to **rest on objectives that reflect the Union's interests, values and goals in a coherent and non-redundant manner.** On the other hand, it needs to **demonstrate context-awareness, and base itself on comprehensive analysis of the evolving global order, and the interests, values and objectives of other state and non-state actors.** It should be clear, for example, which role the EU foresees for a body such as the G20 in the future world order.
- **The Union's strategy should moreover be designed in a forward-looking manner.** Rather than grounding its strategic approach solely on past experience, the Union stands to benefit from anticipations of future political developments across various policy areas.
- In designing its strategic narrative, the EU needs to **prioritise its objectives and operate with varying time horizons, separating the long term from the short term.** Although the Union's ultimate objectives and underlying values are to be maintained, smaller steps and compromises with third parties may be needed to effectively attain them. In this context, it should also strive to integrate existing strategies on certain issue areas or for specific geographical zones, which often come with short- or medium-term objectives, into the overarching strategy.
- **The fluctuating global order requires the EU to opt for an adaptive, 'liquid strategy'. Whereas its narrative must provide the necessary guidance, the Union also needs to empower itself to become more flexible in its day-to-day operations.** In general

<sup>(145)</sup> Following the initiative of Sweden, Poland, Italy and Spain, this debate was started in the 'European Global Strategy project' by several renowned think tanks (<http://www.tegs.eu/about>). See this project's 2013 report 'Towards a European Global Strategy — Securing European Influence in a Changing World'.

terms, the EU needs to act in sync with other actors: if they want to put their interests in line, their interests need to be addressed; if they argue on a value basis, the EU can try to persuade them of its own values. Instead of swimming against the stream, the EU needs to adopt a behaviour that is appropriate to the context.

- **Greater consistency between rhetoric and activities is key:** the perception-based research has shown that the EU's credibility with external actors suffers whenever it acts out of line with its principles and declared values. In this context, the EU needs to put its money where its mouth is, or it will face challenges to its own legitimacy.
- In the multilateral sphere, **if multilateralism is really changing, so should be the EU.** In a 'multilateralism 2.0' context, it needs to take greater account of non-state actors and do more to address the legitimacy demands that its own citizens and third country citizens have vis-à-vis its foreign policy activities.
- In similar vein, **in bilateral relations, it should be able to listen to partners and address their interests and values instead of imposing its own ideas.** This is especially true for relations which are supposedly asymmetrical and in which the EU is considered as the stronger partner — not just in the neighbourhood, but also beyond. 'It will need to become more convincing with its arguments and positions, and more willing to engage with third countries on an equal basis — less hectoring, and more collaboration to pursue jointly agreed goals' <sup>(146)</sup>.
- This also implies that **the EU needs to be more modest in its foreign policies:** it will need to scale down ambitions and focus on what is attainable <sup>(147)</sup>.

#### 4.3.2. Foreign policymaking: adopting foreign policy positions to pursue the strategy

The internal preparedness of the EU for foreign policy represents, as studies have shown, an important, necessary (albeit not sufficient) precondition for external effectiveness <sup>(148)</sup>. Regarding this dimension, one can generally claim that 'impetus for change must come from politics as the legal and institutional mechanisms have been exhausted' <sup>(149)</sup>. A new treaty reform regarding foreign policy does not seem to be on the cards at this stage. The existing framework therefore needs to be used as effectively as possible by the political forces that desire a strengthened global representation of the EU.

#### *Institutional underpinnings: who should decide on the EU's foreign policy?*

- Foreign policy is a highly complex matter, not only within and for the EU. Issues are interlinked and require the input of many players. Coordination needs are, therefore, high. In such a context, the key question is how the EU can more effectively reach foreign policy decisions. **Greater**

<sup>(146)</sup> Smith, op. cit., 2013, 124.

<sup>(147)</sup> The former Finnish Foreign Minister, Alexander Stubb, calls this 'dignified foreign policy', ibid.

<sup>(148)</sup> See, for example, Bruyninckx et al., op. cit., 2012.

<sup>(149)</sup> Mayer, H., The Challenge of Coherence and Consistency in EU Foreign policy, in Telò, M., and Ponjaert, F. (eds.), *The EU's Foreign Policy: What Kind of Power and Diplomatic Action?*, Ashgate, London, 2013, 105–120, 114–115 [GR:EEN].

**effectiveness often involves the centralisation in the hands of few rather than many players. The High Representative, who is also a Commissioner, can — together with the EEAS — ensure the crucial coordination role, if fully empowered to do so.** As a recent report on the EEAS puts it: it **should ‘become the prime diplomatic entrepreneur in EU external action (...) foster reciprocal information sharing, cooperation and coordination between national and EU levels, shape and propose novel policy ideas through stimulating out-of-the-box thinking, and push (...) beyond the common denominator of what Member States will permit’** <sup>(150)</sup>.

- Many useful proposals on the practical functioning of the EEAS, for example regarding the inter-institutional relations with the Commission and the Council, are included in its 2013 (self-) review and independent studies produced in the run-up to this Review <sup>(151)</sup>. They touch upon issues such as effective procedures, for example ‘the need for a “new deal” between the EEAS and the Commission, implying a far greater “coordination reflex” on both sides, stringent work flows, or improved staff training’ <sup>(152)</sup>, but cannot be reproduced in detail here. These, at times, highly technical proposals show that ‘advancement of the EEAS will necessarily be conditioned by its bureaucratic nature. The Service’s performance will necessarily continue to depend on the quality of the Council’s political direction’ <sup>(153)</sup>. **The willingness of EU Member States to invest political capital in the Union’s foreign policy, essentially via the Foreign Affairs Council, is therefore of crucial importance.**
- It is also evident, however that ‘while having a considerable impact on the daily working of the Service, this **practical focus cannot make up for the lack of coherence and strategic vision that still troubles the EU external action’** <sup>(154)</sup>. **Institutional improvements in the day-to-day making of foreign policy cannot compensate for deficits at the level of strategic guidance.**

### *Procedural underpinnings: how should the EU decide on its foreign policy?*

- Day-to-day foreign policy cannot be made in isolation from the outside world, but requires structured input of information about the external context. **The EEAS, with its numerous delegations in third countries, is well-placed to centralise all sorts of intelligence about the wider world, but it needs to be given the mandate to systematically feed this information back into the EU’s foreign policy machinery.** In this context, reliance on expertise from other than the diplomatic sector, including researchers and civil society organisations with particular area- or issue-specific expertise should be sought.
- **In its decision-making, the EU needs to opt for more straightforward procedures, involving fewer players and leading to faster results,** especially when it comes to reacting to crises situations. **In some areas, this may involve a move to qualified majority voting in the Foreign Affairs Council.**

<sup>(150)</sup> European Parliament, op. cit., 2013, 84.

<sup>(151)</sup> Ashton, C., op. cit., 2013; European Parliament, op. cit., 2013.

<sup>(152)</sup> European Parliament, op. cit., 2013, 86.

<sup>(153)</sup> Zotti, A., *The EU Diplomacy Under Review*, Institute for International Political Studies, Milan, 2013.

<sup>(154)</sup> Ibid.

### 4.3.3. Foreign policy implementation: effective EU diplomacy

Once foreign policies are defined and adopted, they need to be implemented.

#### *External representation: who should defend the EU's strategy?*

- An often-voiced idea is that the EU should be speaking with a single voice and have a single chair, especially in its multilateral relations. If the results of the projects synthesised in this Review demonstrate one thing, it is the need to be context-specific also in this regard: **in some areas, 'speaking with a single voice' may be the most effective foreign policy strategy, in other domains synergies can be gained from acting with many players conveying a single message.**
- What is often more important than a single voice is a common message, and this should be understood and respected by all players that make up the composite foreign policy actor of the EU. This observation notwithstanding, **as a general rule of thumb the EEAS should be the EU's key organ for foreign policy. If this is, for legal reasons or due to a need for specific policy expertise, not possible or inopportune, third-country players should at least be able to clearly understand who is in charge of EU foreign policy in a given domain.**
- **Coordination at all levels should be reinforced between staff at the EEAS headquarters and the EU delegations as well as between staff at EU delegations and Member State representatives in third countries.**

#### *Suitable foreign policy tools: how should the EU advance its strategy?*

- **The EU needs to have a clear understanding of its own resources and the instruments at its disposal.** In each given situation, it will need to select the type of power it wants to employ and which instruments may be suited to do so: soft (diplomatic) actions, incentivising (economic) foreign policies or coercive (military) reactions. A combination of different approaches suited to the context, also referred to as a 'smart power' strategy, needs to be the desired form of behaviour <sup>(155)</sup>. Such intelligent issue-linkage, building also on the Union's undisputable trade muscle and its development aid, is only possible if coordination is centralised and provides for the necessary flexibility to react to changing contexts. This also involves a debate about the level and use of the Union's military capacities.
- **The EU's engagement must be solution-driven, not form-driven.** In each given case, the EU should select instruments that offer solutions based on an understanding of the situation on the ground, and of the positions and motives of its partners <sup>(156)</sup>.
- **This also implies that foreign policy tools need to be used in a stringent and coherent manner, appropriate to the context and targeted at the actor and/or**

<sup>(155)</sup> Nye, op. cit., 2011.

<sup>(156)</sup> MERCURY project, op. cit., 2010, 17.

**forum it engages with.** There is hardly ever a one-size-fits-all solution for two problems or partners. So while its objectives apply more widely, its tools need to be tailor-made.

- The choice of the right instrument also goes hand in hand with the **selection of suitable coalition partners alongside 'targets' of its foreign policy.** Besides reaching out to emerging and developing powers, the EU may benefit from a more systematic engagement with the growing number of non-state actors operating at all levels and in all areas of global governance.



## 5. Concluding remarks



This Policy Review synthesised important parts of the existing research on the EU as a global actor regarding major multilateral and bilateral activities and focusing on the fields of economic, environmental and security policies. To do so, it drew on the insights of projects financed under the sixth and seventh framework programmes for research. Taking into account the still fairly recent nature of the EU's ascent to a fully fledged global player, this Review argues that the Union is, today, a highly active, but rather eclectic, foreign policy actor. The eclecticism of its foreign policies regularly impairs its effectiveness. To contribute to remedying this, this Review extracts the practical implications from the empirical evidence and transforms these into policy recommendations.

Based on the audit of EU foreign policy it provides, this Review argues that **the Union needs to become a more flexible foreign policy player that operates with a clear strategic narrative, but can adapt to rapidly evolving global contexts.** To this end, several adaptations to its foreign policymaking and implementation are suggested. Most importantly, **the Union needs to design a more comprehensive strategy that sketches out a vision of the role the EU can play in the global governance of the 21st century. This strategy should provide the necessary guidance regarding principles, values and medium- to long-term objectives, but it should also be flexible enough to allow the key foreign policy actors within the Union to adapt to changing contexts and react to crisis situations. A key coordinating and representation role should be played by the High Representative and the European External Action Service. Both need to be fully empowered to assume such responsibilities. To lay down the changes in a comprehensive guiding document, an update of the European Security Strategy, possibly under a more encompassing name and taking account of the evolving world order, should therefore be considered.**

Implementing such changes is not an easy task. This Review should therefore also be seen as a contribution to a necessary debate. EU integration, including in the foreign policy domain, has been an incremental process. **Only if the political support of the Member States can be mobilised, further advances will become possible.** So far, this support has not always been apparent, undermining the credibility and effectiveness of EU foreign policy. **However, several trends spark the hope that the Union can make necessary adaptations.** The turnover in the EU institutions in late 2014, but also major global events such as the promises of finally concluding the Doha Development Round or the 2015 Paris climate summit on European soil provide opportunities to prove that the EU is willing to empower itself to be an effective global player both bilaterally and in its multilateral activities. The appointments for the EU's top (foreign policy) positions, including the High Representative, may be a particularly significant chance for Member States to demonstrate reinforced support to EU foreign policy.

Research can critically accompany these processes. The pan-European collaborative projects referred to throughout this Review, and many others conducted all over Europe and beyond have long followed the evolution of EU foreign policy. Their analyses have become ever richer in theoretical-conceptual and empirical terms, providing not only for sophisticated academic debates, but also for manifold insights informing the choices faced by foreign policymakers. Since the evolution of the EU as a global actor is far from over, this highly complex domain is bound to continue to attract interest, also through projects under Horizon 2020.

# Annex

## Overview of the covered projects

Project acronym	Full title	Coordinator and coordinating institution	Website
<b>ATLANTIC FUTURE</b> FP7	<i>Towards an Atlantic area? Mapping trends, perspectives and interregional dynamics between Europe, Africa and the Americas</i>	<b>Jordi Bacaria</b> Barcelona Institute for International Affairs (CIDOB)	<a href="http://www.atlanticfuture.eu">www.atlanticfuture.eu</a>
<b>CHINESEVIEWS-OFEU</b> FP7	<i>Disaggregating Chinese Perception of the EU and Implications for the EU's China Policy</i>	<b>Zhengxu Wang</b> University of Nottingham	<a href="http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/research/funded-projects/chinese-eu/consortium.aspx">www.nottingham.ac.uk/cpi/research/funded-projects/chinese-eu/consortium.aspx</a>
<b>EU-GRASP</b> FP7	<i>Changing multilateralism: the EU as a global-regional actor in security and peace</i>	<b>Luk van Langenhove</b> UNU-CRIS, Bruges	<a href="http://eugrasp.eu/Home.308.0.html?&amp;no_cache=1">http://eugrasp.eu/Home.308.0.html?&amp;no_cache=1</a>
<b>EUROBROAD-MAP</b> FP7	<i>European Union and the world seen from abroad</i>	<b>Claude Grasland</b> Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, UMR Geographie-Cites, Paris	<a href="http://www.eurobroadmap.eu">www.eurobroadmap.eu</a>
<b>GARNET</b> FP6	<i>Global Governance, Regionalisation and Regulation: The Role of the EU</i>	<b>Richard Higgott</b> University of Warwick	<a href="http://www.garnet-eu.org/">www.garnet-eu.org/</a>
<b>GR:EEN</b> FP7	<i>Global reordering: Evolution through European networks</i>	<b>Shaun Breslin</b> University of Warwick	<a href="http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/green">www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/csgr/green</a>
<b>MERCURY</b> FP7	<i>Multilateralism and the new external relations of the European Union</i>	<b>Mark Aspinwall</b> University of Edinburgh	<a href="http://mercury.uni-koeln.de/">http://mercury.uni-koeln.de/</a>
<b>TRANSWORLD</b> FP7	<i>Redefining the transatlantic relationship and its role in shaping global governance</i>	<b>Nathalie Tocci</b> Institute of International Affairs, Rome	<a href="http://www.transworld-fp7.eu">www.transworld-fp7.eu</a>



## HOW TO OBTAIN EU PUBLICATIONS

### Free publications:

- one copy:  
via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>);
- more than one copy or posters/maps:  
from the European Union's representations ([http://ec.europa.eu/represent\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/represent_en.htm));  
from the delegations in non-EU countries ([http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/index_en.htm));  
by contacting the Europe Direct service ([http://europa.eu/eurodirect/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/eurodirect/index_en.htm)) or  
calling 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (freephone number from anywhere in the EU) (\*).

(\* ) The information given is free, as are most calls (though some operators, phone boxes or hotels may charge you).

### Priced publications:

- via EU Bookshop (<http://bookshop.europa.eu>).

### Priced subscriptions:

- via one of the sales agents of the Publications Office of the European Union ([http://publications.europa.eu/others/agents/index\\_en.htm](http://publications.europa.eu/others/agents/index_en.htm)).

2014 marks, in many respects, a transitional year for the European Union. A new European Parliament is elected, a new College of the European Commission will take office, and some of the key figures of EU politics will be renewed. Besides the posts of European Commission and European Council presidents, the position of the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy will have to be newly filled. The successor of Catherine Ashton will be the face of the European Union's foreign policy for years to come, with an important potential to provide further impetus to the Union's external activities. 2014 is therefore also a good moment to engage in stock-taking of the achievements of past years, while turning toward the future. The present Policy Review strives to achieve precisely this with regard to EU foreign policy. It discusses the advances in European Union bilateral and multilateral activities beyond the Union's immediate neighbourhood, while highlighting the remaining challenges that the EU faces when engaging on the global scene. To discuss the EU's role as a global actor, it draws on the key findings of eight major research projects conducted in the area of Social Sciences and Humanities and financed under the Sixth and Seventh Framework Programmes for Research. Based on this discussion, the Review advances a set of policy implications on the strategic outlook, contents and conduct of the EU's foreign policy for the medium-term future. In the face of ongoing transformations of the global system, it is argued that the EU needs to seize the opportunities provided by the year 2014 and develop a comprehensive strategic narrative for its foreign policy.

*Studies & Reports*

