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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	EC follow-up: Thematic debate on Strategic Agenda priorities - The Union as a strong global actor

This note sets out the state of play on some of the main orientations relevant to the fifth priority area of the Strategic Agenda adopted in June 2014, the Union as a strong global actor. It aims to provide the Council with an overview of the objectives highlighted by the new High Representative on relevant policies and to serve as a first basis for discussion on further steps required in this area.

The Union as a strong global actor

Both the European Council and the Council highlighted several times how recent events testify about the fast-shifting nature of the Union's strategic and geopolitical environment, not least at the Union's eastern and southern borders. Instability in our wider neighbourhood is at an all-time high. Against this background a stronger engagement of the European Union in world affairs remains crucial.

In December 2013 European Council mandated the High Representative to "assess the impact of changes in the global environment" and report back in 2015 on "challenges and opportunities arising for the Union". It is clear that this environment has changed significantly, rapidly and dramatically, and that the EU cannot simply carry on with existing policies as if nothing had happened. A comprehensive stock-take and reflection is needed, to ensure that our approaches are relevant and realistic - and based on a shared strategic outlook. The High Representative expressed her aim to stimulate a wide-ranging and inclusive debate, involving not just the EU institutions and member state governments but the wider foreign policy community as well.

Some preparatory work has already been undertaken cooperatively amongst the EU institutions, including the European Parliament, this should be a helpful basis for the strategic debate that must follow. The experience from the 2003 European Security Strategy indicates that the process of reflecting strategically and collectively on EU foreign policy is crucially important to define how we want to act in the world. In light of the radically transformed global and regional circumstances we live in, a joint process of strategic reflection could eventually lead the way to a new European Security Strategy.

Maximise our clout

The European Council emphasised the importance of ensuring consistency between member states' and EU foreign policy goals, and of improving coordination and coherence between the main fields of EU external action, such as trade, energy, justice and home affairs, development and economic policies. There is not one single internal priority of the European Union that is not linked to an external dimension.

In the dramatically changed global environment, protecting and promoting European interests and values will become increasingly difficult unless Europeans increasingly combine their efforts and resources, and act together. Our objective is to show unity of purpose and unity of action as EU institutions if we want to affirm the EU as a truly global actor.

In the face of growing international challenges, the EU can only be effective through collective action by all national and EU actors. Cooperation with and amongst Member States remains vital at all levels and on a regular basis. Setting strategic priorities for the EU foreign policy and ensuring the full co-ownership by all Member States require more coordination not only across the different tools of the EU's external action but also as regards the contributions that MS are able to provide in the areas where they retain competence. To this end the Foreign Affairs Council has launched a review of its working methods in order to improve the effectiveness of its discussions and the efficiency of its decision making.

The structure of the new Commission will facilitate the task of projecting a strong and coherent external agenda for the EU. The coordinated work of the External Relations Commissioners, liaising closely with others whose portfolios have important external implications, is designed to provide the necessary strategic guidance in areas of the Commission's competence, develop joint approaches, and improve the efficiency of policy making both externally and internally.

Full implementation of the measures put forward by the EU's Comprehensive Approach to external conflicts and crises, as well as a coordinated approach between the external and internal security aspects remain of key importance to the EU's success. The ongoing crises in Europe's immediate neighbourhood clearly demonstrate that Europe needs to take concerted action also in this regard.

Unprecedented political events in our neighbourhood have demonstrated that energy security is a collective responsibility for Europe, for which we have to show unity of purpose and action. Efforts to implement the European Energy Security Strategy must be well coordinated.

Be a strong partner in our neighbourhood

The European Union has a critically important mission to promote stability, prosperity and democracy in the countries closest to the Union, on the European continent, in the Mediterranean, Africa and in the Middle East.

In order to exercise its global responsibilities, the Union needs to become an effective force in its part of the world, not only the neighbourhood but also the extended neighbourhood - the neighbours of our neighbours. As crises do not wait in turn, the EU needs to be an effective actor in parallel geographic theatres simultaneously.

For those neighbours with an enlargement perspective the continued credibility of the Union's enlargement policy is the best, if not only, guarantee for long-term transformation in terms of democracy, stability and economic development. EU policy will aim to support countries with a European perspective to implement democratic and economic reforms, uphold the rule of law, strengthen economic governance and competitiveness, develop institutional capacities and a well-functioning public administration, and build bridges with neighbouring countries. The process continues to be guided by the provisions of Article 49 of the Treaty, the Council's renewed consensus on enlargement, and by the political guidance formulated by the European Council and the Council. Enlargement is based on fair and rigorous conditionality, and its pace continues to depend mainly on the delivery of reforms in each enlargement country, with each country being judged on its own merits. Currently ongoing enlargement negotiations will continue at a pace determined by each aspirant country's progress on reform (co-ownership and quality before speed should prevail), especially in the area of the rule of law, while taking into account the European interest.

The focus of the EU neighbourhood policy will be on strengthening its political and economic ties with its Southern and Eastern neighbourhood. This requires close cooperation between authorities and stakeholders at national, European and international level. The Commission and the EEAS have already launched a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy with the aim of developing and strengthening our neighbourhood policy to promote stability at Europe's borders and help neighbouring countries to develop and support stable democratic institutions and to become more prosperous, by drawing the full benefit from their association agreements with the EU. This process is guided by the principles of devising tailor made solutions for each of the partner countries concerned, focus on the European interest (security, prosperity, hope for the future for the citizens of those countries and reduction of migration pressure in the EU), the possibility of flexible reactions to developments, and an equal focus on the Eastern and the Southern neighbourhood.

The EU will further engage, in different forms, with its neighbours on the East in promoting and supporting efforts aimed at security, institutional reforms, political processes, economic challenges and energy challenges. The Union will also need to reassess its relations with Russia. At the same time, equal attention must be paid to the South, in order to ensure that the EU become an effective player in the Middle East, develop common framework for common action to stop ISIL, pay major attention to failing states, and also provide the necessary support to successful reform and transition efforts. In addition, political, technological and climate developments require that a special care be paid to the High North and the Arctic.

Awareness of migration and mobility challenges must be factored into the EU's neighbourhood policies. Migration policy should continue to influence EU external action with a focus on the immediate neighbourhood, on migratory routes and on countries of origin and transit. The Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) continues representing the overarching framework of the EU's external migration policy, focusing on four objectives: better organising legal migration and fostering well-managed mobility; preventing and combating irregular migration, and eradicating trafficking in human beings; maximising the development impact of migration and mobility; and promoting international protection. Mobility partnerships and Common Agendas for Migrations and Mobility continue to be the core of this cooperation framework, including targets, commitments and specific support measures and addressing mobility issues, security issues and the need to facilitate return and readmission of irregular migrants.

Security has been and will continue to be an equally important component of migration policies, including in the external dimension. Human trafficking and smuggling has become a core business for organized crime and terrorist networks and mixed inflows from conflict areas need to be closely monitored. The problem of foreign fighters, although not directly linked to migration flows, is a specific issue that needs to be duly addressed. In this respect the active collaboration between foreign and home affairs ministers should be strengthened, particularly concerning judicial and police cooperation and information sharing. We need to ensure coherence and complementarity between the internal and external aspects of EU security policies.

Engage our global strategic partners

Engagement with global strategic partners, in particular the Union's transatlantic partners, on a wide range of issues - from trade and cyber security to human rights and conflict prevention, to non-proliferation and crisis management - remains a key aspect of EU external affairs both bilaterally and in multilateral fora.

Trade is a key source of EU growth and jobs and should therefore be pursued in its own right. Ongoing negotiations with the United States and Japan as well as the successful negotiations with Canada on a Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement are emblematic. At the same time, trade policy is one of the most important foreign policy tools at the Union's disposal. In order to ensure that trade policy is coherent with and complementary to foreign policy goals, a joint approach is being developed through the Commissioners' Group on External Action. In this regard, special attention will be paid to the EU's relations with ACP countries. Trade policy in fact can represent a key instrument to eradicate poverty and promote the economies of countries, as well as to induce integration in the global economy and respect for values such as human rights, labour rights and environmental protection.

Human rights remain one of the Union's overarching priorities and they serve as a compass in relations with third countries, international organizations and civil society as well. To this end, the EU's Strategic Framework and Action Plan, which commit the Union to promoting human rights in all areas of foreign relations "without exception" is a crucial step forward. Efforts must now be tailored to implementation, including the continuation and expansion of best practices, especially on negotiating human rights clauses in all international agreements, incorporating human rights considerations in CSDP missions, and ensuring human rights compliance of the Union's counter-terrorism policy. The Commission will aim to mainstream human rights in vital policy areas such as migration, development, environment, internet governance, trade, investment and technology and business. In this context, the Union has started to deepen its engagement with strategic partners and interlocutors in international and regional organizations, regularly engage NGOs and civil society groups and closely coordinate with Member States. Work has also started on strengthening the link between development and migration, as well as integrating this link into the Union's strategic framework for human rights and democracy.

Alongside its efforts towards a common asylum policy, the EU must reinforce its action to support host and transit countries' capacities with a view to helping these countries fulfil their international obligations.

In managing crises the Union can count on key and reliable partners, primarily in the context of the transatlantic partnership which is now, more than ever, strategic both security-wise and economics-wise. In addition, it continues to work together with other organisations - regional and global - starting with the UN as well as NATO, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, the League of Arab States, UfM, the African Union. We have common work, just as we have a common agenda. This will be on climate change, which is part of our foreign policy, and has to be even more part of our foreign policy. It will be on human rights, where Europeans have a particular responsibility in developing a coherent agenda, including our internal policies.

Develop security and defence cooperation

The development of security and defence cooperation is a key ingredient of the EU's ability to live up to its commitments and responsibilities across the world. This goal includes:

- strengthening the Common Security and Defence Policy, in full complementarity with NATO;
- ensuring that member states maintain and develop the necessary civilian and military capabilities, including through pooling and sharing;
- the preservation of a stronger European defence industry.

The efforts to re-establish common strategic assessments and approaches are equally essential to re-invigorate cooperative efforts in the defence sphere. The logic for greater pooling of defence efforts and resources is compelling, and largely uncontested: but difficulties persist in translating that into concrete action. The EDA remains a valuable instrument to help the Member States achieve the tasks they have set themselves, with the committed, constructive cooperation of its many stakeholders. Cooperation between EDA and Commission, especially in the sphere of research and technology has been growing.

National leaders in the European Council have re-committed to working together on defence matters; identified a short-list of priority projects for cooperation; and called for reports on progress. The achievement of a real European defence equipment market is essential to the long-term health of the defence industrial base in Europe, as well as our ability to equip our armed forces cost-effectively. Work has started on the assessment of the impact of the 2009 package on defence cooperation and industry in Europe.

The provisions of the Treaty on permanent structured cooperation remain part of the untapped potential of the Treaty.