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IMPLEMENTING EU GLOBAL STRATEGY: CHALLENGES FOR EU DIPLOMACY

ABSTRACT

The Treaty of Lisbon gave new institutional ideas regarding EU external actions which were the basis for taking further steps in strengthening the effectiveness of the EU as an international actor. The EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy – EUGS (2016) was prepared as a response to the need for a stronger Europe in times of crisis. The new strategic document together with its institutional framework places a question over EU diplomatic capability in its implementation. The aim of this paper is to analyze relations between the assumptions of the EUGS and EU diplomatic potential, with special emphasis on the European External Action Service. The author poses the following research questions: what are the institutional challenges in implementing the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy? What are the capabilities of the EU diplomatic system in responding to global threats and challenges? What are the roles of the European External Action Service and member states in implementing EUGS priorities?

Key words

EU Global Strategy, EU diplomacy, European External Action Service, global threats and challenges

The political, security and economic crises on the international arena have revealed the institutional limitations of the EU as a global actor. In addition to the new ideas provided by the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU presented its Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS, 2016) as a response to the common challenges Europe is facing. In the current literature, the authors are mostly focusing on comparative studies between the European Security Strategy (2003) and EUGS (e.g. Henökl, 2018), EUGS provisions (Biscop, 2017; Wagner & Anholt, 2016), particular EU policies and the EU's approaches to external challenges (Biscop, 2017; Juncos, 2018; Youngs, 2020), or perceptions of the EU by its strategic partners (Chaban & Holland, 2019). The aim of the paper is not to analyze particular priorities of the EUGS and their implementation, but to examine relations between EUGS assumptions and EU institutional capabilities provided by the Treaty of Lisbon. It concentrates on the internal constraints of the EU's diplomatic system regarding the main priorities and goals of the EU Global Strategy and examines EU diplomacy potential and limitations. The author poses the following research questions: what are the institutional challenges in implementing the EU Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy? What are the capabilities of the EU's diplomatic system in responding to global threats and challenges? What are the roles of the European External Action Service and member states in implementing EUGS priorities? The analysis is based on rational choice institutionalism as well as intergovernmentalism, and uses qualitative research with data collected from EU documents as well as secondary literature. It is divided into three parts: the first gives an overview of the EUGS main assumptions in relation to diplomatic capabilities; secondly, the author explains the role of EU diplomacy in implementing the Global Strategy, while the conclusion indicates the challenges the EU's diplomatic system needs to face.

1. Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy: assumptions

The idea of a new strategy for the EU was a result of significant changes on the global scene since the European Security Strategy (ESS) from 2003. The new challenges that the EU had been facing such as unstable neighbors, the terrorism threat, climate change, illegal migration and cybercrime, required a strategic response from the EU as an international actor. At the same time, disintegration movements which have emerged in Europe (including the Brexit referendum) have started to build divisions among Europeans regarding (further) integration. Therefore, both external as well as internal circumstances have become direct

incentives for global strategy preparation. The new document was formulated in order to contribute to strengthening EU identity and help Europeans unite in the face of external challenges and internal divisions. It was also meant to indicate EU ambitions and the need for coherence in its external relations (Tocci, 2017, p. 23).

One of the main goals of Federica Mogherini, when taking office as High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy in 2014, was to prepare a new global strategy for the EU which would replace the ESS from 2003. The result of wide consultations (not only with member states and EU institutions but also with civil society) was presented in June 2016 in the document *Shared Vision, Common Action: a stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* (EUGS). According to its provisions, the EU is to promote its principles, values and common interests on the basis of five priorities: security in the EU, state and societal resilience to the East and South, an integrated approach to conflicts and crises, cooperative regional order, and global governance for the 21st century (EUGS, 2019, pp. 18–44). All of them are based on the EU's commitment to multilateral cooperation on the international arena, as Federica Mogherini emphasized in her foreword to the EUGS: "None of our countries has the strength nor the resources to address these threats and seize the opportunities of our time alone". The tools for achieving these global goals include economic and crisis management and humanitarian aid, as well as diplomatic instruments (Piskorska, 2018, p. 73). The key aspect to the implementation of the EUGS assumptions lies in the "joined-up" EU which refers not only to cooperation between EU institutions and member states, but also to strengthening the EU diplomatic service as a central point in building coherence in its external action. For this purpose, new areas of external instruments presented in the EUGS concern economic, energy, and cultural diplomacy (EUGS, 2019, p. 49). What is crucial in the use of diplomatic capabilities in implementing the Global Strategy goals, is a comprehensive approach that includes a multidimensional use of EU tools in order to prevent, control and resolve conflicts and crises. It is also a multilateral approach based on cooperation with all the actors engaged in a conflict or crisis. This gives space for the development of preventive diplomacy and mediation with a significant role for EU delegations and special representatives (EUGS, 2019, p. 30). The emphasis is on *tailor-made policy* together with principled pragmatism towards neighboring countries, as the former *one-size fits all* model has not proved to be effective in relations with Eastern and Southern neighbors (Piskorska, 2018, p. 78). In regional conflicts, the EU still needs to focus on de-escalatory diplomacy (Dennison et al., 2015, p. 1). This is most

evident in the Eastern Partnership region where the EU supports diplomatic instruments in resolving conflict in Eastern Ukraine, as well as in separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabkh and Transnistria. State and societal resilience requires an improvement in public diplomacy (Piskorska, 2018, pp. 83–85). Nevertheless, in order to interact responsibly with external actors, credibility seems to be essential which can be built on EU effectiveness, its power of attraction, as well as coherence between the EU and member state actions (Czachór, 2017, p. 224).

In autumn 2019, Federica Mogherini emphasized the EU's efforts in maintaining a multilateral system in the last few years. The examples of preserving the Iran nuclear deal, the Paris agreement to combat climate change, the creation of the International Contact Group regarding the crisis in Venezuela, engagement in peace processes (e.g. Syria), as well as cooperation with regional organizations (African Union, ASEAN, the Mercosur and others) confirm the EU in its involvement towards multilateralism (Mogherini, 2019a). At the same time, a partnership based on cooperation has become one of the main principles in relations with neighboring countries (Piskorska, 2018, p. 79). However, investment in solid partnerships and multilateral dialogue requires building a wide network of strong partners that needs "participatory diplomacy" (Mogherini, 2019a). Facing the common threats and challenges may bring the EU and its partners closer in cooperation, however finding a common ground in multilateral dialogue can become a particular challenge in times of internal divisions.

2. The role of EU diplomacy in implementing the EUGS

The notion of EU diplomacy has become of particular importance in the context of the EU position building on the global arena while it is trying to enhance its role as a political player. Taking into account the narrow definition of diplomacy – as an instrument in implementing foreign policy – a demand for effective diplomacy implies the need to develop EU diplomatic tools (Smith, 2015, p. 18). In times of international threats and challenges that exceed the operational capabilities of individual countries, the need for multilateral cooperation is growing. On the one hand, this strengthens EU capacity as a diplomatic actor; on the other, the process is very demanding due to the EU's institutional limitations. The main challenge it is facing concerns the coherence of its diplomatic system and reflects multilevel diplomacy limiting its external effectiveness. The obstacle lies in the lack of a sharp division of competences in foreign policy between the EU and its member states. Moreover, there is a discrepancy of national

interests, the international ambitions of individual countries, as well as a lack of a single decision center to direct EU foreign policy (Grosse, 2009, pp. 3–5). The new system of EU diplomacy introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon has been proposed as a response to external challenges and the need for strengthening its effectiveness on the international scene by providing internal coherence to EU action (Keukeleire, Smith & Vanhoonacker, 2010, pp. 2–4).

The EUGS has been prepared after the reform of EU diplomatic structures provided in the Treaty of Lisbon which has brought significant changes to institutional aspects of EU external relations. The creation of new institutions has become a major step in building the EU diplomatic corps. The Treaty of Lisbon introduces two key positions: a new President of the European Council and a High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy (HR). The institutional division is however still blurred as both are responsible for representing the EU externally. The President of the European Council ensures “the external representation of the EU on issues concerning its common foreign and security policy” (Art. 15 of TEU), but also presides over the European Council which decides the strategic interests of the EU, while the HR “conducts the EU’s common and security policy” and chairs the Foreign Affairs Council (Art. 18 of TEU). The key aspect in ensuring cooperation lies in the personal factors of those who hold these two positions. As the HR has become a Vice-President of the European Commission, he/she gained responsibility for EU external action consistency. This provision has become a significant step in building an institutional balance in external relations, though it has not ensured its transparency as the European Commission continues to be engaged in foreign policy. The leading institutional innovation in the development of EU diplomatic capability is the creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) which plays the main role in fulfilling the mandate of the HR (the EEAS was established by a Council Decision (26 June 2010) on the basis of art. 27 TEU). The EEAS has been created as a diplomatic service of a hybrid nature. It is “a functionally autonomous body of the EU” (Art. 1 Council Decision of 26 July 2010) which consists of the central administration in Brussels and EU Delegations to third countries as well as international organisations. Members of the EEAS come from the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council, and the diplomatic services of the member states (Art. 27 (3) TEU). The breakthrough in building the EU’s own diplomatic structure came with the transition from European Commission delegations into those of the EU. This change has brought the chance to gain stability in EU representation, though the division of competences between European Commission and EEAS in different aspects of external relations might

still not be clear, particularly to third countries and other partners. This can have an impact on the coherence of EU action, as well as on expectations towards the EU regarding solutions to global challenges.

The EUGS has become a good starting point for the new position of the High Representative and the EEAS to present the EU's interests on an international arena widely. The Global Strategy is a guiding document, not an action plan, therefore further constant supervision over its implementation is needed. Both the HR and the EEAS can improve the EU's effectiveness in this matter, but the EU diplomatic service needs to enhance its role in the policymaking process and be involved in combining all aspects of external policies (foreign, security, trade etc.). The EUGS has become a tool in supporting cooperation among different policies, and the various EU actors involved in its external action. A crucial step in implementing the assumption of a "joined-up" EU could be seen in the establishment of the Commissioners' Group of External Relations led by the High Representative (Tocci, 2015, p. 117) which has contributed to the development of cooperation between the European Commission and the European External Action Service. Josep Borrell Fontelles, who took office as High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy on 1 December 2019, announced that he was guided by three principles: realism, unity and partnership. This declaration can be considered as a continuation of Mogherini's work as the new HR's rules relate to EUGS assumptions.

Although the EU had new diplomatic tools at its disposal, taking into account the complexity of the EU diplomatic system which still need to include the competences of member states in their foreign policies (the Lisbon Treaty did not bring changes to the decision-making process in EU foreign policy), there comes the question of the EU's capabilities in implementing its global aims and priorities. In order to answer this matter, analysis needs to include not only restrictions to the EU diplomatic system but also to the internal rules of EU external actions which have an impact on effectiveness of its activities.

EU external relations are characterized by its specific nature, as they combine a supranational as well as an intergovernmental component. They refer both to economic relations (with common commercial policy, development policy, humanitarian aid), and Common Foreign and Security Policy. This complexity is of a particular challenge in terms of EUGS implementation, as many EU international activities relate to different types of EU external policies (e.g. European Neighbourhood Policy). The challenge refers to various decision-making processes on a supranational and intergovernmental level as well which require coordination in order to achieve external coherence. Despite the increase in EU

competences in external activities, EU foreign policy is still based on intergovernmental agreement which can lead to competition for power between common institutions and individual member countries (Grosse, 2011, p. 79). In 2015, the EU Institute for Security Studies prepared a report “Towards the EU global strategy – background, process, references”, which indicates five challenges for the EU’s external action that seem still valid after the adoption of the EU Global Strategy in 2016. These are *policy direction* – the EU constantly needs to adapt to the changing environment; *flexibility* – needed in development policy, as well as in the fight against terrorism in order to boost its effectiveness; *leverage* – in trade, development, and also European Neighbourhood Policy; *coordination* – among EU institutions, as well as members states; and *capability* – both in migration, and common security and defence policy (Missiroli, 2015, pp. 145–148). In such circumstances, a need for a comprehensive approach in all aspects of EU activity on an international arena has gained significance as it brings closer different areas of the EU’s external policies. Taking into account the mixed types of relationships between the EU and its external partners (e.g. trade relations are often only one aspect of bilateral cooperation), EU diplomacy has the potential to become the EU’s most effective instrument. As the main idea of the EUGS was to move “from vision to action”, one of the main questions in implementing the EU assumptions and its strategic goals concerns the diplomatic challenges the EU needs to face.

Conclusions

The EU Global Strategy was meant to make a contribution to institutional attempts to ensure the coherence of EU external relations. The report on the implementation of the EUGS from 2019 has marked a development in the EU’s diplomatic capabilities. The ‘joined-up’ approach could be seen mostly within economic, cultural and digital diplomacy. Progress needs however further human as well as financial resources, which refer to public diplomacy as well, a key domain in countering disinformation (EUGS, 2019). Taking into account EU global priorities indicated in the EUGS, the EU will presumably continue pursuing its interests through economic diplomacy which derives from the EU’s economic power executed mostly in common commercial and development policies. The call for a “joined-up” EU has not changed the divisions among EU institutions regarding their competences within the external action provided by the Treaty of Lisbon (Smith, 2018, pp. 49–55). This refers mostly to tensions between the European Commission and the European External Action Service

that require further coordination in the policy-making system. At the same time, the EUGS outlines the need for the EU to be more responsive to different types of crises which bring an opportunity for action for EU diplomacy with the European External Action Service at the front. However, the “capability-expectations gap” (Hill, 1993) in EU foreign policy still creates an obstacle in implementing long-term assumptions. The reason lies in the multiplicity of actors engaged in foreign policy making. The High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, President of the European Council, President of the European Commission as well as member states are all entitled to act in foreign affairs. Representatives of the European Parliament, EU Special Representatives, and other EU high officials are also involved in foreign issues (Grosse, 2011, p. 82). This network of actors causes competence ambiguities which can affect the EU’s short and long term capabilities. The European External Action Service was established to facilitate coordination of activities which belong to the intergovernmental framework (within the Common Foreign and Security Policy), as well as supranational structures (with the leading position for the European Commission). Taking into consideration EUGS priorities, it seems necessary for the EEAS to become the hub that connects all actors responsible for foreign issues. Cooperation is, however, essential not only between EU institutions, but also among member states. At the same time, this needs to be equally transparent internally, as well as towards external actors. The emphasis on multilateral cooperation with other actors in developing solutions to international crises, particularly in neighbouring areas will become a test for the effectiveness of the EU diplomatic system (Leonard, 2017, pp. 4–5). As Knud Erik Jørgensen indicated, it is firstly needed to “specify the sectors of multilateral diplomacy that the EEAS is responsible for” (Jørgensen, 2015, p. 32). It is thus necessary to agree on a clear division of diplomatic work between the EEAS and member countries.

EU delegations play a crucial role in EU external relations. Heidi Maurer and Kristi Raik characterize them as “neither fish nor fowl” as they do not have the same tasks as the diplomatic representations of states, and also differ from delegations of other international organizations, due to their special status. On the one hand, EU delegations are responsible for the diplomatic representation of the EU towards a host country; on the other, they play a coordinating role among member countries (Maurer & Raik, 2018, pp. 58–60). Before the Lisbon Treaty, their work was limited to representing the interests of the European Commission but since then, they have combined all aspects of external relations, including Common Foreign and Security Policy. EU delegations coordinate meetings of the representatives of member countries in the host state on a regular basis.

This task strengthens internally and externally the role of the EU abroad, although decisions about foreign policy are not taken in the field, but in Brussels. The coordination aspect cannot be overestimated though, particularly to small and medium-sized EU countries in terms of information flow, due to their limited resources on the ground (Maurer & Raik, 2018, p. 69).

Despite the limitations the EU diplomacy system is facing, the European External Action Service has the potential to become a key actor in ensuring coherence in EU external relations. Coordination of EU goals on the international scene is crucial to implementing EU Global Strategy priorities. Although the EU's effectiveness is seen best in the fields of its exclusive competences, the new diplomatic system has expanded the EU's capabilities as an international actor by enabling closer cooperation between EU institutions and member countries. The diplomatic headquarters in Brussels together with EU delegations in the field may improve the EU's effectiveness as a global player, but only if member states agree on stronger diplomatic cooperation.

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