

## **New European security context**

On the verge of the new millennium, the end of the Cold War forced a global rebalancing of power and brought forth a new set of challenges for the EU and the World. Whether in economic, political or military terms, the EU has had to renegotiate its position and faces ever-increasing doubt about its capacity to handle the duties bestowed on world powers. This paper is by no mean exhaustive, but aims to give an overview of the modern security challenges in Europe according to the three themes of economic security, intra-European unity, and transnational threats.

To begin with, the European Union has been challenged economically. The end of the Cold war and the incredible growth of the BRIC countries have turned the spotlight away from the European continent. What is more, the 2008 crisis worsened these conditions and the EU has heavily increased its sovereign debt to finance its activities with the percentage of debt to GDP for EU 27 rocketing from 57.9% in 2009 to 81.1% in 2010 (Ec.europa.eu, 2016). Nonetheless, in order to regain a leadership position in international trade, the EU has set up numerous free trade agreements in Asia, Latin America, and the United-States (Hadfield & Fiott, 2013: 176). Thus, as we can see that the rebalancing of international trade in to a multipolar system has left the EU struggling to maintain its economic clout.

If the EU faced external threats, it was also undermined internally. In fact, the EU's ability to speak as a unified voice is almost inexistent. In 2012 during the UN vote to recognize Palestine as a State, only 14 member states voted in favor of the motion supported by Brussels (Hadfield & Fiott, 2013: 174). Concerning the European External Action Service (EEAS), the European Parliament reported that at present no shared understanding among stakeholders outside or within the EEAS on the role, mandate and position of the Service within the EU external action architecture (EP, 2013, p. 83). Moreover, the enduring antagonisms between the UK, France and Germany, have also put major pressure on EU security policy, particularly concerning NATO. Indeed, the UK and France have taken it in turns to veto each other security approaches. In 24–5 October 2002, the UK vetoed a decision on the deployment of an EU force. The following November, President Chirac tried to block the requested six-month extension to the

NATO force in favor of a two-month extension after which an EU force would replace it (Menon, 2004: 636). On the other hand, Britain and France both emphasize a military approach to EU security policy, involving the existence of armed forces capable of responding to military crises, while Germany and smaller EU countries are ready to participate in out-of-region peacekeeping operations, even without UN resolutions (Hill, 2004: 26). What is more, these historically divergent links also mean that bilateralism can quickly supplant collective diplomacy like when in July 2002 the Spanish government fell into conflict with Morocco, and found itself lacking any support from Common Foreign Security Policy, not least because of French ties to Rabat. (Hill, 2004 : 22). Therefore, the multiple divisions within EU supranational institutions act as an internal threat to EU sovereignty and greatly limit its ability to take action.

Nevertheless, despite its issues, the EU security policy has had some successes over the years. Since 2003, the EU has carried out some 30 civilian missions and military operations on three continents (Europa.eu, 2016). In 2012 alone, the EEAS took part in the facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, the Swiss-mediated efforts aimed at Russia's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession, the E3+3 negotiations with Iran, the stalled Middle East peace process negotiations and the Cairo group (Hadfield & Fiott, 2013: 170). Nonetheless, I agree with the view that the EU is mostly a civilian power, which is better suited with systemic, functional/economic, long-term questions rather than with short-term, political crisis-management problems. (Hill, 2004 p 22). This is, mostly because peacekeeping mission are easier to get approved by the 27 EU members than military alternatives. In the case of Syria, the EU response took the form of sanctions on the Bashar al-Assad regime, and humanitarian assistance to Syria via Lebanon and Jordan due to the frictions caused by the intervention in Libya of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the EU's inability to convince Russia and China of the need for a United Nations Security Council Resolution on the situation. (Hadfield & Fiott, 2013 :173). In fact, I would argue that the EU is bound to occupy a secondary role to the US because the Union collectively has the capacity neither to support the United States position nor to stand up to it. (Hill, 2004: 14). This is exemplified by the EU pivotal to Asia following that of the US, where it is a non-security actor but maintains the potential diplomatic capabilities to diffuse issues such as the 2012 Sino-Japanese dispute over the ownership of the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands.

In conclusion, the European security context has greatly evolved in the last decade and the EU has struggled to keep up with its demands. The EU's decreasing economic weight severely constrains its ability to engage in significant reform, as well as military or humanitarian operations. What is more, nationalist and Euro-skeptic policies have blossomed during the crisis-ridden decade of the 2000s, which also threatens EU security from within. Finally, the EU is only equipped to successfully get involved in relatively low-profile peacekeeping and humanitarian projects, which offers little solace without the US or NATO's military support.

## **Bibliography:**

Corporate Europe Observatory. (2015). TTIP leak: EU proposal undermines democratic values. [online] Available at: <http://corporateeurope.org/pressreleases/2015/04/ttip-leak-eu-proposal-undermines-democratic-values> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2016].

European Parliament (EP) Directorate-General for External Policies, Directorate B Policy Department (2013) *The Organisation and Functioning of the European External Action Service: Achievements, Challenges and Opportunities*.

Europa.eu. (2016). *EUROPA - Topics of the European Union - Foreign & Security Policy*. [online] Available at: [http://europa.eu/pol/cfsp/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/pol/cfsp/index_en.htm) [Accessed 13 Mar. 2016].

Ec.europa.eu. (2016). Eurostat - Tables, Graphs and Maps Interface (TGM) table. [online] Available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=teina225&plugin=1> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2016].

Hadfield, A. and Fiott, D. (2013) 'Europe and the Rest of the World', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(1):168-182.

Hill, C. (2004) 'Renationalising or Regrouping: EU Foreign Policy since 11 September 2001', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 42(1): 143-163.

Ladi, S. & Tsarouhas, D. 2014, "The Politics of Austerity and Public Policy Reform in the EU", *Political Studies Review*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 171-180.

Menon, A. (2004) 'From Crisis to Catharsis: ESDP after Iraq', *International Affairs*, 80(4): 631-648

Roy, R. (2015). WTO Panel Rules Against India's Solar Program. [online] WSJ. Available at: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/wto-panel-rules-against-indias-solar-program-1441112645> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2016].

The BRICS Post. (2014). China lauds WTO ruling against the US. [online] Available at: <http://thebricspost.com/china-lauds-wto-ruling-against-the-us/> [Accessed 13 Mar. 2016].