

Geopolitical Challenges in the 21st Century – The Place of the EU in International Politics

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Abstract

For the first time in Europe, until the start of the war in Ukraine by Russia in February 2022, there is such prosperity, such security and such freedom. A violence in the first half of the 20th century gave way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history. The creation of the European Union was decisive for this development. It has changed the relationship between our countries and the lives of our citizens. European countries are determined to seek the peaceful resolution of disputes and to cooperate through common institutions. During this period, under the influence of the progressive spread of the rule of law and democracy, authoritarian regimes were transformed into secure, stable and dynamic democracies. The present study aims to present a political-philosophical view of the geopolitical challenges in the 21st century and the place of the EU in international politics. The main points of the article are: global challenges and main threats: security is a prerequisite for development; energy dependence; terrorism, etc.

Keywords: geopolitical challenges, international politics, EU.

1. Introduction

For the first time in the history of Europe, there was such prosperity, security and freedom. Violence in the first half of the 20th century gave way to a period of peace and stability unprecedented in European history.

The creation of the European Union was decisive for this development. It has changed the relationship between our countries and the lives of our citizens. European countries are determined to seek the peaceful resolution of disputes and to cooperate through common institutions. During this period, under the influence of the progressive spread of the rule of law and democracy, authoritarian regimes were transformed into secure, stable and dynamic democracies. Successive expansions make the idea of a united and peaceful continent a reality.

The USA has played an essential role in European integration and European security, in particular through NATO. After the end of the Cold War, the United States found itself in a dominant position as a military factor. However, no country is capable of dealing with the complex problems of today alone.

Europe still faces security threats and challenges. The outbreak of conflict in the Balkans in the 1990s, but the problems and the war that Russia started by invading Ukraine in February 2022 reminded us that war continues to threaten our continent. In the past decade, no region of the world remained untouched by armed conflict. Most of these conflicts were internal rather than interstate, and many of the victims were civilians.

As a union of 27 countries, uniting over 500 million people, contributing to a quarter of global gross national product (GNP), with a wide range of tools at its disposal, the European Union is an unavoidably global factor. In the last decade, European forces have been deployed beyond European borders, in remote areas such as Afghanistan, East Timor and DR Congo. The growing convergence of European interests and the strengthening of the EU's mutual solidarity make us a more reliable and effective factor. Europe should be ready to take its share of the responsibility for global security and for building a better world.

However, no country is capable of dealing with the complex problems of today alone. As a union of 27 countries, bringing together over 500 million people, contributing to a quarter of global gross national product (GNP), with a wide range of tools at its disposal, the European Union is an unavoidably global factor. It should be ready to assume its share of responsibility for global security and for building a better world.

2. Security landscape: Global challenges and major threats

The post-Cold War environment is characterized by increasingly open borders and an inextricable entanglement of internal and external aspects of security. Many people have known freedom and prosperity thanks to trade and investment flows, technological development and democratization. Others saw globalization as an obstacle and an injustice. These trends have also expanded the scope of activities of non-state associations, giving them the opportunity to participate in international relations. Moreover, they have led to an increase in European dependence – and hence vulnerability – on interconnected infrastructure in transport, energy, information technology and other areas.

Since 1990, 4 million people have died in wars, 90% of them civilians. Globally, over 18 million people have fled their homes due to conflict.

In most countries of the developing world, poverty and disease cause immense suffering and are serious security concerns. Approximately 3 billion people, or half the world's population, live on less than €2 a day. Every year 45 million people die of hunger and malnutrition. AIDS is currently one of the most devastating pandemics in human history and contributes to the decline of societies. New diseases can spread quickly and become a global threat. Sub-Saharan Africa is poorer than it was 10 years ago. In many cases, economic failure is linked to political problems and severe conflicts.

Security is a prerequisite for development. Conflicts not only destroy infrastructure, including the social infrastructure; they also encourage crime, hinder investment and make it impossible to carry out normal economic activity. Some countries and regions are caught in a cycle of conflict, insecurity and poverty.

Every year 45 million people die of hunger and malnutrition... AIDS contributes to the decline of societies... Security is a necessary condition for development. The competition for natural resources – mainly water – which will become even more fierce as a result of global warming in the coming decades, is likely to cause further upheaval and migration movements in various regions.

Energy dependence is a serious concern in Europe. Europe is the world's largest importer of oil and gas. Currently, 50% of energy consumption is met through imports. This figure will rise to 70% in 2030. Most imports come from the Persian Gulf, Russia and North Africa.

Major threats

Nowadays, it is unlikely that any member state will be the target of large-scale aggression. Instead, Europe is facing new threats that are different, less obvious and harder to predict.

Terrorism. Terrorism threatens people's lives; imposes large costs; is trying to undermine the openness and tolerance of our societies and is a growing strategic threat to all of Europe. Terrorist movements are becoming increasingly secure, connected to electronic networks and ready to use unrestricted violence to cause colossal material and human damage.

The latest wave of terrorism is a global problem and is linked to extreme religious extremism. It is based on a number of complex reasons. These include pressures on the cultural, social and political crises associated with modernization, as well as the alienation of young people who live in foreign societies. This phenomenon is also inherent in our society. "The rise of the Islamist movements as a leading social and political force in the Middle East is the result of the bankruptcy of nationalism, secularism and the left in the Arab world, which created an ideological vacuum, which is filled to a large extent by the fundamentalists, ensuring that Islam is the solution. It is not only about the extent of the return to religion, but about the transformation of religion into a major political factor both by the regimes and by the opposition. These are political movements that deal first and foremost with the social and political mobilization of the masses, and they exert pressure to apply the Islamic law as the law of the state instead of the legal systems taken from the Western model. The Islamic solution offered by these movements has several distinct advantages over others. First, Islam is presented as a comprehensive system that provides all solutions to the problem of this world and the next. Second, the Islamic solution is presented as an alternative to the realization of Arab and Islamic revival and power. Ideas of Islamic movements tend to be inclusive, which increases their attractiveness. They are radical in that they seek seemingly profound solutions to the fundamental problems of society. Third, it is not an imported solution. The Islamic solution is an authentic one, rooted in local culture and suited to local conditions" (Galily & Schwartz, 2021a: 52).

Europe is a single target and base for terrorism: European countries represent a whole and are already the target of terrorist attacks. In the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Spain and Belgium, logistical bases of al-Qaeda militant groups were discovered. Concerted European action is imperative.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction represents the greatest potential threat to our security. International treaty regimes and export control arrangements have slowed the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems. However, we are currently entering a new and dangerous period in which the possibility of an arms race with weapons of mass destruction, specifically in the Middle East, is increasing. In the coming years, the potential of biological weapons may increase as a result of advances in the development of the biological sciences; weapons of mass destruction are also a tangible possibility.

The last time weapons of mass destruction were used was in 1995 by the terrorist sect Aum Supreme Truth in a sarin attack on the Tokyo subway that killed 12 people and injured several thousand. Two years earlier, the same sect spread anthrax spores on a Tokyo Street.

Attacks with chemical and radioactive substances. The proliferation of missile technology adds an additional element of instability and could put Europe at increasing risk.

The worst-case scenario is the acquisition of WMD by terrorist groups. Under such circumstances, a small group could wreak havoc on a scale previously only possible with the participation of states and armies.

Regional conflicts. Issues such as those in Kashmir, the Great Lakes region and the Korean Peninsula have direct and indirect impacts on European interests, as do conflicts closer to Europe, above all those in the Middle East. In addition, the serious or “frozen” conflicts that persist along our borders threaten the stability of the region. They take lives, destroy social and physical infrastructure; and endanger minorities, fundamental freedoms and human rights. Conflicts can lead to extremism, terrorism, and statelessness; they provide an opportunity for organized crime. Regional insecurity may lead to greater demand for WMD. In practice, the best way to deal with new, often elusive threats is sometimes to resolve older issues related to regional conflicts.

Absence of statehood. Poor governance – corruption, abuse of power, weak institutions, and lack of accountability – and civil strife eat away at states from within. In some cases, this causes the collapse of state institutions. Somalia, Liberia and Afghanistan under the Taliban regime are among the best-known recent examples. The collapse of statehood can be linked to obvious threats such as organized crime and terrorism. Statelessness is an alarming phenomenon that undermines governance on a global scale and contributes to regional instability.

Organized crime. Europe is a major target for organized crime. This internal threat to our security has an important external dimension: the cross-border trafficking of drugs, women, illegal migrants and weapons constitutes a significant part of the activities of criminal groups. He may be connected to terrorism.

These criminal activities are often associated with weak or absent statehood. Drug revenues have contributed to the weakening of state structures in a number of drug-producing countries. Revenue from trade in gems, timber and small arms fuels conflicts in other parts of the world. All these activities undermine both the legal order and the social order itself. In extreme cases, organized crime can span the state. 90% of Europe’s heroin is produced from poppy plantations in Afghanistan, where the drug trade funds private armies. Much of the drugs are distributed through criminal networks in the Balkans, which are also responsible for 200,000 of the 700,000 women victims of sex trafficking worldwide. A new dimension of organized crime that needs further attention is the increasing incidence of maritime piracy.

By bringing together these various elements – terrorism seeking maximum violence, the availability of weapons of mass destruction, organized crime, the weakening of the state system, and the “privatization of force” – we may in fact be facing a very serious threat.

We live in a world that offers better prospects but also hides greater threats than before. The future will depend to some extent on our actions. We must simultaneously think globally and act locally. In defense of security and to assert its values, the EU has three strategic objectives.

2.1 Taking action against threats

The European Union has taken active action in response to the main threats. In response to the events of 9/11, the EU took measures including the European Arrest Warrant, actions to combat the financing of terrorism and a mutual legal assistance agreement with the US. The EU continues to develop cooperation in this area and improve its defense capabilities.

For years, the EU has pursued a policy of combating the proliferation of weapons. The Union recently agreed on a further action program, which envisages measures to strengthen the International Atomic Energy Agency, measures to tighten export controls and to combat illegal shipments and illegal supplies. The EU is determined to achieve universal compliance with the

regimes established in multilateral treaties and to endorse treaties and their verification provisions.

The European Union and Member States have taken measures to contribute to the resolution of regional conflicts and to support the recovery of countries with missing statehood, including in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and the DRC. Restoring good governance in the Balkans, strengthening democracy and enabling the authorities in this region to tackle organized crime is one of the most effective ways to tackle the problem of organized crime within the EU.

In the age of globalization, threats in geographically distant places can be just as serious as those in close proximity. Nuclear tests in North Korea, nuclear risks in South Asia and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East are causing concern in Europe.

In the era of globalization, geographically distant threats can be just as serious as those in close proximity. The first line of defense will often be outside European borders. New threats are dynamic. Too early does not apply to conflict prevention and threat prevention. Central or Southeast Asia could become a threat to European countries or their citizens. At the same time, through global communications, greater awareness is achieved in Europe regarding regional conflicts or humanitarian tragedies elsewhere in the world.

Our traditional concept of self-defense – up to and during the Cold War – was based on the threat of attack. In the context of new threats, the first line of defense will often be outside European borders. New threats are dynamic in nature. Over time, the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction increases; unless action is taken, terrorist networks will become increasingly dangerous. Neglecting them leads to growing statelessness and organized crime, as evidenced by events in West Africa. This means that we should be ready to act before we face a crisis situation. The concept of “too early” does not apply to conflict prevention and threat prevention.

Unlike the massive, visible threat of the Cold War, none of the new threats are purely military; nor can it be removed by purely military means. Each threat requires the complex use of different tools. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction can be contained through export controls and through the application of political, economic and other pressures, in addition to addressing the underlying political causes. Preventing terrorism may require a range of intelligence, police, judicial, military and other means. In countries with missing statehood, it may be necessary to use military means to restore order and humanitarian means to overcome the immediate consequences of the crisis. Regional conflicts require political solutions, but the post-conflict phase may require the use of military means and effective policing. Economic instruments are used for recovery, and civilian crisis management facilitates the return of civilian governance. The European Union is well prepared to respond to situations with such different aspects.

2.2 Building security in our neighboring regions

Even in the era of globalization, the geographical aspect remains relevant. It is of common European interest to have good governance in the countries we border. Neighboring countries with serious conflicts, weak states where organized crime thrives, troubled societies, or excessively high population growth near the EU's borders pose a problem for Europe.

Enlargement should not create new dividing lines in Europe. Resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe.

The integration of the acceding countries increases our security, but at the same time increases the proximity between Europe and troubled regions. Our task is to contribute to the construction of a “ring” of well-governed countries to the east of the European Union and on the borders with the Mediterranean region, with which we maintain close cooperative relations.

The importance of all this is best illustrated in the Balkan region. Thanks to our joint efforts with the US, Russia, NATO and other international partners, stability in the region is no longer threatened by the outbreak of a major conflict. Confidence in our foreign policy depends on consolidating our achievements in this region. The European perspective represents both a strategic goal and an incentive for reform.

It is not in our interest that enlargement creates new dividing lines in Europe. We need to bring our neighbors to the east in the benefits of economic and political cooperation while solving the political problems in that region. It is now time to show a greater and more active interest in the problems of the South Caucasus, which in time will also become a neighboring region.

Resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict is a strategic priority for Europe. Without achieving this goal, the other problems in the Middle East are unlikely to be resolved. The European Union must maintain its commitment and readiness to allocate the necessary resources until the problem is resolved. The two-state solution, which Europe has long supported, is now widely supported. The implementation of this decision will require the united joint efforts of the European Union, the United States, the United Nations and Russia, as well as the countries of the region, but above all the Israelis and Palestinians themselves.

Serious problems of economic stagnation, social tension and unresolved conflicts persist in the Mediterranean region. The interests of the European Union require continuous ties with Mediterranean partners through more effective cooperation in the fields of economy, security and culture within the framework of the Barcelona Process. A broader engagement with the Arab world should be considered.

2.3 A global order based on an effective multilateral approach

In a world of global threats, global markets and global means of information, security and prosperity in the EU increasingly depend on the establishment of an efficient multilateral system. Creating a stronger international community, well-functioning international institutions and a rules-based international order is our goal.

We support international law and its development. The main framework in the field of international relations is the Charter of the United Nations. The UN Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Strengthening the UN, enabling it to fulfill its responsibilities and act efficiently is a European priority.

We want international organizations, regimes and treaties to deal effectively with threats to international peace and security, and therefore we must be ready to respond to violations of their rules.

Membership in key international system institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and international financial institutions has become more accessible. China is already a member of the WTO and Russia is negotiating its accession. We should aim to expand the membership of such organizations while maintaining their high standards.

One of the central elements of the international system is transatlantic relations. This is not only of bilateral interest but is for the benefit of the international community as a whole. NATO is largely an expression of this relationship.

Regional organizations also strengthen governance on a global scale. The influence and effectiveness of the OSCE and the Council of Europe are of particular importance to the European Union. Other regional organizations such as ASEAN, Mercosur and the African Union make important contributions to a more orderly world.

Our security and prosperity increasingly depend on the establishment of an efficient multilateral system. We support international law and its development. The main framework in the field of international relations is the Charter of the United Nations.

One of the conditions for a rules-based international order is that the legal order evolves in response to new aspects such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and global warming. It is in our interest to continue to develop existing institutions such as the World Trade Organization and to support new ones such as the International Criminal Court. Our own experience within Europe shows that security can be enhanced through confidence-building and arms control regimes. Such instruments can make a significant contribution to security and stability in our neighboring regions and beyond.

The quality of international society depends on the quality of the governments that underpin it. A world of well-governed democracies is the best defense for our security. Spreading good governance, supporting social and political reforms, tackling corruption and abuse of power, establishing the rule of law and protecting human rights are the best means of strengthening the international order.

Trade and development policies can be powerful tools for promoting reforms. As a major source of public aid worldwide and a major player in trade, the European Union and its Member States are well-placed to pursue these goals.

Promoting good governance through support programs, conditionality and targeted trade measures remains an essential element of our policy which should be further developed. A world that guarantees justice and opportunity for all will be safer for the European Union and its citizens.

A number of countries have positioned themselves outside the boundaries of international society. Some seek isolation; others continually violate international norms. It is desirable that these countries rejoin the international community and the EU should be ready to assist them. For those who do not wish to do so, it should be clear that this will have certain consequences, including and in their relations with the European Union.

3. Political implications for Europe

The low union offers progress in the conduct of a coherent foreign policy and effective crisis management. We have tools that can be used effectively, as is evident in the Balkans and other regions. But in order to make a contribution that corresponds to the activity of our full potential, it is necessary to show greater, greater coherence and use more fully your abilities. We need to work with the others.

We need to be more proactive in pursuing us strategic goals. This applies to the entire set of available tools for crisis management and conflict prevention, including political, diplomatic, military and civil activities, as well as those in the field of trade and development. To counter new dynamic threats, proactive policies are needed. A strategic culture must be developed that favors early, rapid and, if necessary, vigorous intervention.

As a Union of 27 Member States, whose defense expenditure exceeds EUR 160 billion, we should be able to conduct several operations at the same time. We could achieve better results by planning operations that combine military and civilian capabilities.

The EU should support the United Nations in responding to threats to international peace and security. The EU is committed to expanding its cooperation with the UN to assist countries emerging from conflict, as well as to provide greater support to the UN in situations requiring short-term crisis management.

We must be able to act before the situation in our surrounding countries deteriorates, at the first sign of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and before a humanitarian emergency arises. A preventive commitment can prevent more serious future problems. A European Union that assumes greater responsibility and shows greater activity will also have greater political weight.

A strategic culture must be developed that favors early, rapid and, if necessary, vigorous intervention.

4. Greater coherence

The goal of a more capable Europe is achievable, although realizing our full potential will take time. Actions taken – specifically the creation of a defense agency – are steps in the right direction.

To make our forces more flexible and mobile, and to give them the ability to counter new threats, we need to invest more in defense and use it more effectively.

Systematic use of pooled common resources would reduce duplication, reduce overall costs and increase capabilities in the short term.

In almost all cases of serious intervention, efficient military operations are followed by public chaos. We need greater capacity to mobilize all necessary funds in crisis and post-crisis situations.

Greater diplomatic capabilities: we need a system pooling the resources of the Member States and those of the EU institutions. Solving more remote and nonspecific problems requires better understanding and communication

A common threat assessment is the best basis for joint action. This requires better intelligence sharing between Member States and between them and partner countries.

As we increase our capabilities in various areas, we should look at the possibility of a broader set of missions. This could include joint disarmament operations, support to third countries in the fight against terrorism and security reform. Security reform will be part of larger institution building.

Standing EU/NATO arrangements, specifically the Berlin Plus arrangements, strengthen the EU's operational capabilities and establish a framework for a strategic partnership between the two organizations in crisis management. This reflects the determination of both organizations to meet the challenges of the new century.

The essence of the common foreign and security policy, as well as the European security and defense policy, is that we are stronger when we act together. In recent years, we have created a number of different tools, each with its own structure and rationale.

The challenge now is to bring together the various instruments and capabilities: European aid programs and the European Development Fund, military and civilian capabilities of the Member States and other instruments. All of this can have an impact on our security and that of third parties. Security is the first necessary condition for development.

Diplomatic efforts, development, trade and environmental policies should pursue the same goals. In a crisis situation, there is no alternative but unity of command.

Better coordination between external action and justice and home affairs policies is essential for the fight against terrorism and organized crime.

Greater coordination is needed not only between EU instruments but also with regard to the external activities of individual Member States.

Policies at the regional level also need to be coordinated, particularly in conflict resolution. Problems are rarely solved by one country or without regional assistance, as the experience of the Balkans and West Africa testifies in different ways.

5. Conclusion: Working in partnership

There are few, if any, problems that we can tackle alone. The above threats are general and affect us and our closest partners. International cooperation is a necessity. We must pursue our goals through multilateral cooperation within international organizations and through partnerships with key actors.

The transatlantic relationship is indispensable. Together, the European Union and the United States can become an outstanding force for good in the world. Our goal should be an effective and balanced partnership with the US. This is another reason for the EU to build up its capabilities and improve the coherence of its actions.

Together, the European Union and the United States can become an outstanding force for good in the world

We must continue to strive for a close relationship with Russia, a significant factor in our security and prosperity. Respect for common values will facilitate progress towards a strategic partnership.

Our history, geography and cultural ties bind us to all parts of the world: our neighbors in the Middle East, and our partners in Africa, Latin America and Asia. These relationships are an important advantage that should be exploited. In particular, we should seek to develop strategic partnerships with Japan, China, Canada and India, and with all other countries that share our goals and values, and stand ready to act in support of them.

We live in a world that presents us with new threats but also presents us with new opportunities. The European Union has the potential to make a significant contribution, helping both to overcome the threats and realize the opportunities. An active and capable European Union would have weight on a global scale. In this way, it would contribute to the establishment of an effective multilateral system to achieve a fairer, safer and more united world. "Therefore, in a future war, strong Western armies will need to understand that military strength is not sufficient to defeat the enemy. It is also necessary to develop the mental strength of the civilian community. Since the citizens of the state who did not serve in the military in most Western countries are not accustomed to military coping, the government system needs to develop a feeling that will avoid the losses of people in a continuous conflict and even military-operative harm on the part of the enemy (such as, for example, surface-to-surface missiles) from psychologically influencing them and encouraging them to continue to support the fighting and not to protest against it in different civilian-democratic forums" (Galily & Schwartz, 2021b: 92).

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