

# THOUGHTS ON EUROPEAN INTERESTS

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IS the European experience—the creation of a multinational space based on justice and compromise—threatened in a piecemeal world of nations characterized by an ever-present show of force and the resurgence of a balance of power approach to the conduct of international relations? Facing protagonists that despise and ridicule the EU, how is it possible to stay on the course of European values? What are the conditions for the European Union to establish itself as a strategic player by way of a foreign policy which ought to be more than an accommodating soft power? And along which main geographical lines are these efforts to be directed?

The war of independence of the Ukrainian nation (and the related loss of lives when Malaysia Airlines flight MH17 was shot down by pro-Russian separatists) in 2014 was a genuine geo-

political turning point for all Europeans, making them aware, in a rather brutal way, of what binds them together, as opposed to relying on the fading memories stemming from the historical achievements in the wake of World War II.

Other strategic challenges preceded this one, but never caused the sort of collective mobilization we are observing in the case of Ukraine. Different and grave crises emerging on the southern and eastern edges of the Mediterranean, as well as in Sub-Saharan Africa, only caught the attention of those rare states capable of combining military activities and diplomatic and political pressure—France in the first place. Practically two-thirds of the most serious crises in 2014 erupted no further than three to six hours flight time away from Brussels. Consider in this context the fact that the UN Security Council spent 62 percent of its debating time on Africa in

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2012 and 2013. We can thus conclude that Europeans live in the most precarious of neighborhoods. To stay indifferent is, therefore, not an option. In any event, this was the course France opted for (Mali, Central African Republic, Iraqi Kurdistan, Lebanon, and Syria): engagement in the field and the involvement of the UN.

One could say that there is a “proximal near abroad” close to institutional Europe (in the form of the European Union and associated states). However, there are parts which are far abroad—more remote, yet with strategic tensions no less serious from the European perspective, and not only in economic terms.

In my view, in spite of the struggle of institutional Europe to define itself as a global player, the importance of it becoming part of regional and global engagements cannot but lead it to further progress along this road. It is, therefore, time to move forward in three directions: to define the limits of the European project, in order to have a more efficient foreign policy able to clearly distinguish home from foreign affairs; to make public a shortlist of common European interests by compiling a strategic “White Paper” in the course of 2015; and, finally, to not give up furthering

the rule of law and the acquired practices of multilateralism, which are a European invention, in a world characterized by the resurgence of a balance of power approach to the conduct of international relations.

## FINALLY DEFINING THE LIMITS

How is one to feel part of a political and geopolitical community if its limits are not known? How to deal with foreign affairs if it is not known where home stops and foreign begins?

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It is a tragic paradox of sorts that the seriousness of the Ukrainian crisis made Europeans more aware of their interests and their heritage and of the pull their system has over neighboring nations, as well as of their capacity to influence.

The war of Ukrainian emancipation, waged

since the spring 2014 by the elected authorities in Kiev against the ever growing intrusion by the Kremlin and their henchmen from the Oblast of Donetsk, is equally a delimiting conflict between the European Union (the Ukrainian nation aspires to get closer to it) and the Russian Federation. It is for the first time in the territorial history of the European construction that its enlargement (ever since the first association treaties were signed) is fought for and acquired by force of arms.

This brings us back to the issue of defining the possibilities regarding the Russian Federation. One camp would like to see Russia excluded from “Europe,” because of its imperial past and authoritarian regime; they advocate an approach of repelling and containing. Others come forward with the idea to associate Russia with the European system on the basis of mutual economic interests and ancient cultural ties. For the first group, the crisis in Ukraine is an opportunity, and they welcome NATO to reinforce its permanent military presence in Szczecin, Poland. For the others, the Kremlin’s policies are jeopardizing the project of mutual interdependence, which might lead through gradual opening up to the beginning of a transformation of Russian society.

Thinking about the limits of the European Union today, at the end of 2014, is in fact making a choice between several different ways to interact with Russia—bearing in mind that the current policy of the Kremlin is making a cooperation approach less and less practical. In the words of Vaclav Havel:

Russia has been expanding and retracting throughout its history. The majority of conflicts originate in border disputes and in the conquest or loss of territories. On that day when we calmly come to an agreement where the European Union ends and Russia begins, half of the tensions between the two would cease to exist.

Yet the moment a geopolitical doctrine of exclusive spheres of influence imposed itself, the calm vanished.

From the perspective of Moscow, EU enlargement, especially when it comes hand in hand with the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Alliance, is perceived as a loss of access to territories where Russian leaders see their national interest: Ukraine first, but equally Moldova, Belarus and the Caucasian states. The Kremlin is suffering from a siege mentality complex resulting in an extensive concept of strategic interests, accompanied by a tendency to reaffirm itself on the international scene, as well as a marked reluctance to become an integral part of the world economy. In their worldview, Russia’s elites are to maintain passionate ties with Ukraine in the innermost circle of their interests.

In a 1999 interview, Polish historian and politician Bronislaw Geremek underlined the role of the dreamlike elements in political actions, coupled with a hard-nosed historical realism. Here is what he said:

There is no reason to be afraid. The dream plays an essential role in politics, for it organizes imagination and imbues activities with sense. In the European dream, there are elements of economic integration as well as of opening to the East, the European republics of the ex-USSR included. The Eastern borders of

Europe were not defined by history, geography or culture: it is an “American style” border, a shifting one, and it was always thus. And Russia has to come to accept it; a border is not a wall, an airtight barrier between civilizations. But we need to be realistic as well: Russia is something different indeed. Russia is an empire.

Fixing Europe’s eastern limits means, in effect, defining a strategy toward Russia. I keep thinking that this strategy needs to privilege as much as possible a firm European anchoring of Russia—provided, of course, that its leaders do not opt for a policy that amounts to what can be called ‘cut-off and autarchy,’ risking an ever greater dependency on China.

Looking to the south, the institutional limits of Europe are clear—albeit the interactions are strong, permanent and of a structural nature. To the south of the European Union, the question of final limits of the Union was resolved once and for all with a refusal of the request made by King Hassan II of Morocco to join the EU. Israel is sometimes cited in this context; this country is taking part in a series of European projects (mostly research ones). All told, the EU’s financial and commercial exchange are as strong with the countries on the southern end of the Mediterranean as they are with Eastern Europe. It is only the vagaries of history that made our common sea into a border.

A maritime and civilizational border does not prevent in any way meaningful exchanges from taking place. To the south is the inevitable and constant issue of migration, similar to the interface between the U.S. and the northern part of Latin America. In spite of neatly defined borders, there is an increased level of interaction due to differences in the standard of living. It is often surprising to see European companies opting for remote destinations (e.g. East Asia) instead of investing in the “proximal near abroad.” Migration challenges—how to manage immigration by means of an intelligent mobility policy—are coupled with a strategic imperative, when one bears in mind that two-thirds of the most serious crises on Earth are located, as we have already pointed out, three to six hours flight from Brussels (Sub-Saharan Africa, Libya, Egypt, the Near and Middle East).

This strategic reality makes it necessary to consider geographical limits in the more general context of levels of activities of the EU. Every level of activity has a corresponding field of activity. However, the fundamental legitimate basis remains in the community formed by the Member States.

### CONCEIVING A WHITE PAPER

Current difficulties affecting the European continent are not the result of a simple economic and financial crisis; they have emerged from geo-economic change and geopolitical

transition of planetary scope and importance. The collective management of current weaknesses (sovereign and private debt, deficit of public finance, slow growth rates) will achieve results, but they are also reducing European considerations and activities to the economic sphere alone. It is, admittedly, a strategy imposed by necessity. Nonetheless, it is critical to keep in mind that the European Union does not just have economic interests, in spite of the fact that geopolitical crises influence more and more the choices investors make.

Has the time not arrived to move on to the third level of European choices? To start building a pole of strength and influence in a polycentric yet very interdependent world—a world lacking in cooperation and rich in critical challenges.

Upon reading any one of the rare published texts that strategically consider how to incorporate the European project into the world at large, one notices a permanent hesitation between the self-definition of the Union as a community of values, on the one hand, and the stating of interests, on the other.

For instance, the September 2012 report on the future of Europe written by eleven EU Foreign Ministers refers to values much more often than interests. The latter are mentioned only twice for every five mentions of the first. At the same time,

however, the text treats the question of the EU as a “global player,” as well as the need for forces to be regrouped in order to build a common integrated approach in different fields (e.g. trade and economic relations, development aid, enlargement and neighborhood policy, migrations, climate change talks and energy safety). The financial crisis and the competition with other economies, other societal models and values, are also treated in this document, which advocates the Union becoming a “real player” on the global scene, particularly in the area of defense.

In the December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012 conclusions of the European Council, two pages and six paragraphs are dedicated to the Common Defense and Security Policy, stating that the Union already has a regional (neighborhood) and global role in the process of civil-military management of crises abroad: “in the changing world of today, the European Union is asked to assume the accumulated responsibilities of maintaining peace and international security, in order to be able to guarantee the safety of its citizens and further its interests.” Progress on this score was to be assessed at the European Council in December 2013. Stressing that the development of capacities should be in tune with the demands of Europe’s ally the United States, the EU’s January 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012 directive proposed that Member States should become “producers” rather than simply “consumers” of security.

This approach might yield, as a mid-term effect, a European “White Paper” on strategy. This document was already foreseen in France’s 2008 White Paper, while at the same time several EU Member States, like Poland for instance, have long been advocating a renewal of the European security strategy—their arguments being the geo-strategic reorientation of the United States and the “growing assertiveness” of Russian leaders. The predominant view is that such a document would be premature, given the overwhelming importance of the economic and financial issues and the scope of internal disagreements.

If we re-read the text of the EU’s 2003 Strategy, which is entitled *A Secure Europe in a Better World*,

we are reminded how pertinent remains the analysis from a decade ago: globalization challenges, terrorism threats, proliferation of arms, long lasting regional conflicts, rogue states, organized crime and—already there—cyber security and global warming. The document was farsighted enough to add to regional and neighborhood challenges those linked to more remote threats: “in the era of globalization, remote threats can be as worrying as those closer to home, as is the case with North Korea,

South Asia and the proliferation of arms.” Settling the Israeli-Arab conflict was cited as one of Europe’s strategic priorities. Seeking strategic partnerships with Japan, China, Canada and India was also foreseen. As interests, we see listed continuous engagement in the Mediterranean region and in the Arab world, “good governance” in place in countries bordering the Union, as well as the development of

international institutions like the World Trade Organization and the International Criminal Court.

Exempting these particular instances, the idea of European interests is never clearly defined. This could be explained by the fear of discrepancies between the different sets of priorities of the Member States, with a reluctance of sorts

regarding the United States, which imposes—in the best case scenario—a kind of strategic separation of tasks, and finally the insistence of political powers privileging a Union which is mostly conceived as a community of values, thus reducing it to “soft power” actions.

Regrets were voiced in 2013 that there was no follow-up to what is known as the 2008 Solana Paper. It seems to me that before it comes to that, one should

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proceed step by step, with the first being to come up with a narrow list of common—or at least shared—strategic interests. That is an undertaking for a small but not exclusive few, and definitely has to have a Franco-German beginning.

Since 2003, there has in fact not been a single collective paper outlining in a convincing way the elements of what could be a Europe-wide agreement regarding the EU's vision of the world. The final report of the European Foreign Action Service provides a classical description of a “strategic context”—namely “volatility, complexity, lack of certitude”—while enumerating locations of inter-state conflicts (the Balkans, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Horn of Africa) as well as long-term risks (cybercrime, terrorism, rogue states). Yet everything is left to the care of the United States, except European and neighborhood security—already progress in a sense. Consider, in this context, Lady Ashton's written introduction, dated October 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013, to the Final Report on the Common Security and Defense Policy. In it, she says that

there are three cases for security and defence. The first is political, and it concerns fulfilling Europe's ambitions on the world stage. The second is operational: ensuring that Europe has the right military capabilities to be able to act. And the third is economic: here it's about jobs, innovation and growth.

Yet the Report itself does not flesh any of this out. Europe's ambitions on the world stage are not defined, and the impact of the presupposed distribution of power is not measured. This is precisely what is lacking, for in my view, a shared assessment is a necessary prerequisite in order to define a narrow list of shared interests.

This strategic stupor seems to have come to an end since the annexation of Crimea and the indirect military intervention in Eastern Ukraine, with the realization that the leaders of Russia have no other foreign policy except one that relies on force. A constant practitioner of the strong hand approach, the Russia of today is sending Europeans back to the geopolitical practices of the twentieth century. This is a brutal shock, and for the first time the process of Europeanization is challenged with arms.

#### EUROPE'S COMMON INTERESTS

Let us turn again to the 2003 document. It could represent a starting point, but it would not be enough just to bring it up to date. The Franco-German document compiled on the occasion of celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Élysée Treaty would also need to be taken up, as well as the commitments stemming from the 2010 Franco-German “2020 Agenda” and the various white papers and strategic reviews available in the two states.

The document of the kind I propose ought to contain the following main features.

The starting point would be a frank and clear statement—or a reminder—by each of the partners of their own strategic interests, explained as they themselves understand them, and which could then feed the common interests. “Every nation in a partnership is entitled to its own interests; the point is to evaluate them peacefully,” as a German defense official recently wrote. The issue at stake is not to reduce these interests to the lowest common denominator. To bear in mind the “red lines” is the only realistic way forward, for the differences they would bring to the surface are perfectly legitimate, and need to be taken into account. For instance, France considers itself entitled to intervene in its former colonies excepting those in North Africa (which proves the case in point that Libya cannot be considered a precedent); whereas in Germany, it is a political axiom that the Bundeswehr cannot intervene in territories once colonized by Berlin.

Since this initial premise is finally accepted, and thanks to the evolution of thinking in Germany—as exemplified by Wolfgang Ishinger, Andreas Schockenhoff, and Roderich Kiesewetter—we are seeing the beginnings of a move in the direction of French analysis, it is

now time to come together and harmonize the way threats and corresponding strategies are perceived in order to arrive at a common strategy. This work should begin with a joint exercise of anticipation of imponderables to be carried out—for instance—by the analytical and perspectives evaluation structures of the two countries. There are already precedents for this, but more needs to be done.

In my view, the list of shared or joint strategic interests need to contain the following:

- safeguarding European strategic autonomy in terms of the security of access to raw materials, open commercial pathways and the maintenance of stocks (critical networks);
- a long term plan for positive interaction with neighboring geopolitical groupings (strong and symmetrical cooperation with the Maghreb, following the transition processes in the Mashrek—undertakings favorable to the long-term anchoring of Russia in Europe, in spite of everything);
- a commitment to joint activities in crisis management arising in areas situated three to six hours flight times from Paris/Brussels/Berlin;
- a strategy of integration into the international system by way of strategic dialogues with emerging mid-sized countries (aside from China, Brazil, and India);

- the strengthening of international safeguards, taking particular care of the application of Romano-Germanic law;
- the pursuit of activities promoting cooperation and development. It is common knowledge that the Union is the biggest international donor of aid for development. The goal is not humanitarian in the first place, but a contribution to long term stability of neighborhoods;
- and, finally, the promotion and protection of trade interests. This is, for us Europeans, an EU-level matter; aside from obviously being global in scope.

Having to face asymmetrical markets, it is important to stress the principle of reciprocity. To protect and to promote our industrial capacity is equally at stake. With regards to the euro, it is noticeable that it is becoming a larger part of global currency reserves (40 percent of the Russian Central Bank, 26 percent of the Chinese Central Bank, almost 28 percent of the world total), which corresponds to the economic and commercial importance of the Union—first partner to all big countries and regional groupings.

## TWO LINES OF ACTION

It is evident that two lines of action are to be considered, each according to its geographic distance from the European Union.

The first lies to the west of the Strait of Hormuz, where European influence as a collective player has to be present regionally. Acting in accordance with our responsibilities in neighboring regions is critical, for as Lady Ashton has stated: “we are to be judged according to our efficiency in our own neighborhoods, to the South and to the East.” Including Ukraine into its sphere of interest is what the Kremlin reproaches Brussels. We have a paradox here, for the idea of influence is not part of the “genes” of the Union; the tools and means to exert influence (from sanctions and culture, to development aid and the promotion of a model based on democratic values) are in the domain of the Member States. It is not easy for the European Union, as such, to promote interests held in common in a highly interdependent yet not very cooperative world.

The second lies to the east of Hormuz. In this part of the world, the key is to define countries and regions of strategic importance and to enter into partnerships, or interactions, with them. The point for Europeans is how to position themselves within global power relationships, so that institutional Europe is perceived from the outside as an unavoidable reality.

When EU leaders receive in quick succession Barack Obama on the occasion of his first state visit, then Xi Jinping as the first ever visiting Chinese head of state to the EU, and finally Shinzo Abe, one is right to think that looking from

Washington, Beijing and Tokyo, European institutions make sense.

From Washington’s perspective, the European Union is its second trade partner; a free trade and investment agreement including new sectors (finance, services, public markets, regulations, standards and tariffs) is being discussed. Europe also represents the majority of NATO allies, and NATO is being called upon once more as tensions in Eastern Europe rise. Europe is, finally, a player able to intervene in crises where the United States is pulling out (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa), and to conduct negotiations jointly with the U.S. *vis-à-vis* third parties (e.g. Iran).

From Beijing’s perspective, the point is to convince the Union to implement a free trade agreement with its first supplier. A global relationship is sought, on the one hand, given the tendency of Western countries to tighten ranks when confronted with new international challenges, particularly one such as a rising China working to assert its strategic interests in Eastern Asia; and, on the other hand, a mutual interest in seeking economic opportunities is rising to the fore, trying to promote a more diverse organization of the world, sometimes defined as multipolar by Beijing.

From Japan’s perspective, the stakes involve strengthening economic and technological ties, and developing a strategic dialogue on Asian strategic issues.

It is now up to the Europeans themselves to make use of their position of balance in order to promote their economic interests in Asia, and to express their strategic autonomy towards their big Atlantic ally. As a first market in the world until 2030 at least, holder of the second-largest reserve currency in the world (25 to 28 percent of world reserves) and the first economic center in the world, the European Union holds many trump cards with which to engage in discussions about the future of global affairs.

It is possible to conceive a leveled strategy that is efficient in that half of the world which is to the east of Hormuz—one that is operational on the Asian continent, where economic growth is evident and where the EU has more than merely economic interests at stake. I believe the Union cannot be satisfied to act as an observer to a possible Washington-Beijing duopoly that conceives itself as the sole manager of emerging crises in regions without collective security structures, and where issues dating back to colonial times (Japan/China

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and Korea), World War II (Japan/Russia), and the Cold War (Korean peninsula) are not yet resolved.

The choice of geographical priorities for political and diplomatic activities will be a function of establishing a rank-ordering of interests, influencing the type and level of activities, as well as the means to employ them. As a result, the European political model, based on the rule of law and shared sovereignty in certain domains, will be considered as a possible blueprint for other regional agglomerations looking for possible organizational structures. This is already visible in ASEAN, where a collective security framework is being considered for 2015; the African Union, where foreign support is evidently European, as is the model; and South America, where the EU's experience is being closely observed.

It is evident now that in order to move on with the third phase of the European project—to think about and position Europe on a world scene—it will

be necessary to enter into a frank dialogue with the United States, but not within the NATO framework, and not just as a conversation about how to apportion tasks. During the Cold War, security on the European continent seemed to be an exclusive prerogative of our great ally, while the Europeans dealt with economic growth and prosperity. From 1991, our future has depended on a choice: if the Union considers itself to be no more than a subset of the West, accepting this division of tasks—then its added value is limited. If, however, the Union considers itself to be one of the poles in a multipolar world, and assumes its global interests—then the added value is very real.

The strength of institutionalized Europe is recognized across the globe for being the most integrated regional agglomeration in the world, and for functioning as community of rights and values. Its weakness lies in not having completed the affirmation of its shared strategic interests. It is in combining the two elements that Europe will become an emerging geopolitical power. ●