

The EU's Global Strategy – Challenges in North Africa and the Middle-East

SUMMARY

This contribution provides an update and critical assessment of EU action in the Middle-East and North Africa (MENA), a region frequently referred as to the European Southern Neighborhood. It examines the different instruments and approaches, which are put at work by a variety of institutional actors, notably the EU Commission, Directorate-Generals (DG) International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO), Neighbourhood and Enlargement (NEAR), and the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO); as well as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the member states, which in their combination are shaping the EU's MENA policy.

The analytical questions are: What can we reasonably expect from EU external action in Middle-East and North Africa? Does EU foreign policy-making at all affect power and governance structures in the MENA region? To what extent, and under what conditions is the EU likely to contribute to promoting democracy and stability? The particular focus hereby is put on the politico-organizational interplay between the EU's institutional architecture, and the effects of EU policies on the political order in Middle-East and Arab world.

Zooming in on the cases of Egypt, Iraq, Libya and Syria, this piece of evidence analyses the design and implementation of EU policies in the areas of security, crisis management, international cooperation and development, and studies the effects thereof in these four key-countries within the region. Based on document review, interviews with policy makers and direct observation, taking into account the local context, as well as the regional and geopolitical dimension, the paper contributes empirical research on EU action in a global hotspot area, undergoing turbulence and violent transformation. Results point to an overstrained Europe, remaining paralyzed in shock and awe, faced with a radically transformed socio-political and security context.

After a brief introduction and presentation of the country cases, section two of this evidence starts with a brief overview of EU Southern Neighbourhood Policy since the 1990s, before analyzing ongoing activities. The final section draws a number of conclusions, discussed in the light of the present debate on the EU's Global strategy and commenting on the discussion paper released in June by HRVP Federica Mogherini.

Keywords: EU foreign policy, external action, 'Global Strategy', European southern neighbourhood, international cooperation and development 'beyond aid'; Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

Introduction

The Arab and Middle-Eastern region, neighbouring on Europe's Southern borders has become an area of high risk with an increasing number of open conflicts, both suffering from and an emitter of terrorism, perceived a direct threat to the European mainland. The turmoil in the South Eastern rim, together with spreading civil war and increasing influence of radical Islam in the Middle East, constitute a massive challenge for EU foreign policy and crisis management capacities. This situation causes tremendous human suffering and triggers refugee movements that, in combination with

‘unfiltered’ South-to-North migration from the Sahel, the Horn or Sub-Saharan Africa, puts enormous pressure on the EU’s external borders and the MS that are most targeted by refugees. So far in 2015, estimated 1.5m refugees have made their way into Europe.

The Arab region, comprising the the sub-regions Maghreb, Mashrek, parts of the Levant and the Arabian peninsula, has been linked with Europe through history, with cultural ties and trade. For centuries, the Middle East and North Africa are known for their political volatility. Wars, power vacuums, grave human rights violations and forced migration have long been common in the region, making it an area of high risk and ‘limited statehood’ (Börzel and Risse 2010, Risse 2013, Krasner and Risse 2015). From the European perspective, a number of open conflicts turn the region into a source of instability, putting the lives and livelihoods of local populations at risk, and representing a threat to international peace and security.

Ever since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, frictions within the Arab societies along religious, ethnic and tribal lines have never ceased and been exploited by some for their mostly short-term political games. In addition, the ability to adapt to a changing environment for the ruling establishment was and is limited. Nevertheless, communication and interconnectivity have improved the knowledge base of the populations and made inequalities and inadequate governance system more visible. As a result of rigid governance structures and failed economic policies, the predominantly young population took to the streets in a movement that has been labelled “Arab Spring”. What started as an act of desperation and public outrage in Sidi Bouzid, a rural town in Tunisia, quickly became a wide-spread movement and only few regimes in the region, and at considerable cost, could shield themselves from the revolutionary frenzy.

This article provides an overview over the EU’s actions in the Middle-East and North Africa, a region grouped by the EU into the European Southern neighborhood. In the light of current developments in the South (as well as in the East) of Europe, it is a fair statement to say that the EU neighbourhood policy has, in many respects, failed (Juncos and Whitman 2015). Whether this is due to the overburdening expectations, to an unforeseeable turn of events or due to structural inadequacies, remains subject to discussions. In March 2015, the High Representative of the Union’s Foreign Policy (HRVP) Mogherini and Neighbourhood Commissioner Hahn jointly announced a review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), through which they will ‘[...] work together in the next months, first of all with our partners [...] on what has had worth over these years and what has to be improved or changed starting from a listening process’ (European Commission 2015).

This contribution critically assesses the different instruments and approaches, which are put in place by a variety of institutional actors, namely the EU Commission, Directorate-Generals (DGs) Development Cooperation (DEVCO), Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (NEAR) and the EU’s Humanitarian Office (ECHO); as well as the European External Action Service (EEAS), which in combination with the member states (MS) are shaping the EU’s MENA policy.

The EU is a relatively new actor on the international diplomatic scene and only a marginal actor in the areas of security and defence, where states have both a traditional quasi-monopoly and hundreds of years of experience – and, as an organization, even the UN has half a century advance. Moreover, the EU has to prove its standing and legitimacy in the midst of fundamental internal crisis and transformation as well as faced with increasingly complex and challenging external political contexts, especially in the Middle-East. Only recently established and explicitly mandated to propose and coordinate the Unions external action, including the common foreign and security policy, the EEAS, as a young institutional creature, is struggling to demonstrate it is worth the investment. Given this peculiar situation combined with a critical lack of operational resources, the politico-organizational

interplay between the EU institutions and member states may turn specific actor constellations and the details of policy-making arrangements into crucial factors for the outcome of EU actions. The EU – and most of its member states alike – has neither capabilities nor the experience to settle the any of the accounts in terms of ‘high politics’. It therefore has to rely on a carefully orchestrated approach of ‘push and pull’, using the full range of EU’s external policy instruments, combining humanitarian aid, development, and trade with migratory policies, financial commitment and its ‘carrots’ of partnership and association policies as well as its symbolic power (or what remains thereof).

The cases examined in this study shed some light on the peculiarities of the design and implementation of EU external policies, as the product of multi-level and multi-stakeholder interaction, and highlight the effects or the lack thereof in partner countries within the region. Both ‘European ‘neighbourhoods’, as Europe unilaterally classifies the regions bordering on peripheral member states, have undergone radical transformation and traversed violent conflict over the past five years. In the East, recent Russian provocations and aggression pose an immediate threat to Europe’s security, and the developments in Syria and Iraq clearly show the limits of EU policies and capacities. These challenges put the Union’s coherence and its action capacities to a test.

Whether the perceived failure of EU policy in the MENA region is due to the overburdening expectations, to the unforeseeable turn of events or due to structural inadequacies, remains subject to discussions and will be examined in this study. Based on empirical evidence from elite interviews and survey data conducted among EEAS and Commission officials, this research examines how international and EU policy-makers evaluate the evolution of the ENP over the last decade, and what options they see for Europe to adjust or re-draft its strategies and instruments.

Case studies

Based on document study, interviews with policy makers and taking into account the local context in recipient countries, as well as the regional and geopolitical dimension, the article contributes empirical research on EU action in a global hotspot area undergoing turbulence and violent transformation. The main instrument used for investigating these cases is process tracing, because such a qualitative approach of interpretative observation and sense-making may help to better understand the contextual factors and the dynamics of inter- and intra-organizational interactions.

Regarding the data, this research examines fresh empirical evidence from elite interviewing and sources from inside EEAS and Commission services, with respect to how EU policy-makers themselves evaluate the evolution of the ENP and related strategies over the last decade, and what options they see for Europe to adjust or re-draft its strategies and instruments. Since not all countries can be dealt with individually in the format of this study, the following cases have initially been selected for this piece of written evidence:

Iraq is a case of post-war reconstruction and state-building, after a foreign, US-led intervention and democratization campaign, chasing Saddam Hussein out of power and eventually executing him, and replacing the rule of the Baath party by a US friendly government. Following this external regime change, sectarian rivalries and the US-backed Sunnite government using their upper-hand to impose themselves over the Shia parts of the population, fragilized the country and drove it towards the brink of discomposure. In 2014 America withdrew its forces and left the country to itself and the goodwill of the international community. As a result, in 2015 the country is de facto partitioned into a Shiite South, Sunni East, and a relatively independent and secure Kurdish North. In response to the destabilizing effects of cross-border terrorist flows, the Council adopted a “Regional Strategy for

Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh Threat", reiterating the need for a comprehensive approach, including security, humanitarian and development policies.¹

Syria, Iraq's Eastern neighbour, is entrapped in a devastating civil war, originating from internal upheaval against an anti-democratic government and later fuelled by the inflow of Muslim extremists. Between 2011, when the Arab spring movement reached the largest Middle-East state and threatened to end the autocratic Alawite regime of the Assad family, and 2015, 200.000 people are estimated to have been killed and 7 million people have been forced to flee their homes, seeking shelter in neighboring countries – and in Europe. A policy of non-intervention (and, as far as the EU is concerned, 'neutrality') contributed to a humanitarian tragedy of epic dimensions, to weaken the diverse rebel groups, and brought the West into the situation of having to choose Assad, over the Islamic State in Syria (ISIS) in 2014. Since then Syria has become a pole of attraction for radicalized youth from Europe to join the Jihad under the banner of *Da'esh*, the Islamic State, as foreign fighters. EU action related to Syria is presently limited to humanitarian intervention on behalf of the refugees.

Post-revolutionary **Egypt**, after the Arab Spring movement took root in what has probably been its most emblematic protest on Cairo's Tahir Square led to a short period of democratization from within, ending with ousting the first democratically elected President Mohammed Mursi, is about to – or has effectively – relapsed into an army-supported strong-man rule, relatively similar to the pre-revolutionary situation of quasi-dictatorship by Hosni Mubarak. Ever since the US withdrew parts of their traditionally generous support to the Egyptian Military, after the overthrow of the first democratically elected President by General al-Sisi, Russia seems to have grasped the opportunity to step in and knit closer ties with the leadership in Cairo (The Economist 18 April 2015, p. 33-34). The EU has struggled to adapt its policies and so far not tabled any convincing proposals nor shown the ambition to do so.

Libya, after the internal upheaval and external intervention by a UK- and French-led coalition, today is basically a failed state, a lawless space, divided between two governments, an Islamist regime, allegedly leaning towards and supported by a branch of Al Qaeda, in Tripoli, and a moderate government in Benghazi, both unable to effectively control the territory. Libya, after the eccentric dictatorship of Muammar Qaddafi represents a double challenge for the EU mainland, first as a breeding ground for terrorism; and second questioning its core values, the universality of Human Rights, as a major harbor of departure for migrants, many of them risking or losing their lives on their perilous fare over the Mediterranean Sea. Libya is a case of both internal rebellion and external (airborne) intervention, through NATO force led by France and the UK. In 2013, the EU has established a border assistance mission (EU BAM Libya) and ships under the EU NAVFOR 'TRITON' mission are patrolling Libyan coastal waters, in order to control the refugee streams.

Notwithstanding the diversity in the individual cases, what they have in common is best characterized as ungoverned spaces or 'areas of limited statehood', i.e. "countries where the state does not have administrative capacity (either material or institutional) to exercise effective control over activities within its own borders" (Krasner and Risse 2015: 546; Börzel and Risse 2010, Risse 2013), to different degrees confronting and challenging the EU as provider of both development assistance, governance capacity and – to a limited extent – human security. By studying EU foreign policy making across and vis-à-vis these countries, the present research aims at examining how the EU performs in these roles, and whether and to what extent it lives up to the expectations and to the EU's

¹ Council (2015), 'Conclusions on the EU Regional Strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh Threat' (7267/15), of 16 March.

own objectives guiding its external action, i.e. in foreign and security, neighbourhood and development policies.

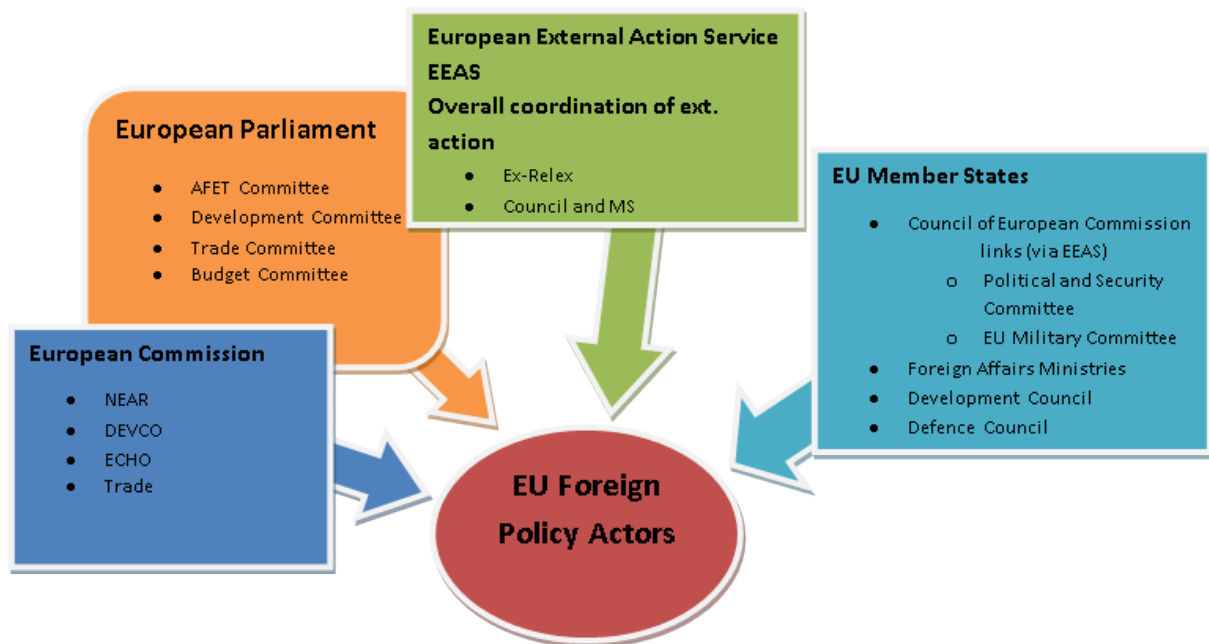
EU Foreign Policy in the Arab world

In the recent past, attempts to define relations between EU and the MENA date back to the Barcelona process, established by the Barcelona Declaration of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference of 1995. The three “baskets” for this process, namely (1) political stability and security, (2) Economic and financial cooperation and (3) cooperation on social, cultural and economic issues were later institutionalized in the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. To implement the Barcelona working programme and part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the EU provided technical and financial assistance through the Mediterranean Development Assistance (MEDA) and loans by the European Investment Bank. Subsequently, the EU signed a series of association agreements with Tunisia (1995), Israel (1995), Morocco (1996), Jordan (1997), the Palestinian authority (1997), Egypt (2001), Algeria (2002) and Lebanon (2002). The negotiations with Syria remained inconclusive.

In spite of these attempts, one can still not speak of a unified comprehensive EU policy towards MENA. First of all, EU institutions do not have the competence to decide about specific foreign policies, especially security and defence remain prerogatives of the member states, even though frequently community capacities are needed to accompany action in these areas. Secondly, the countries in question are too different in their development and state of democracy, and too diverse are their specific problems, issues and interests to include them in a ‘one-size fits all’ approach (Börzel and Risse 2004). The EU itself as a composite and multilevel system comprises a number of actors with diverging competences, agendas, and interests, different also in their organizational setup, modus operandi and the political support, they can mobilize. Democracy promotion in the MENA is a cross-sectoral, shared-competence and multi-level effort, involving community and intergovernmental competence areas, requiring administrative capacities at several layers and of different organizational types, drawing on various political and bureaucratic power and resource bases.

Figure 1 schematically depicts the main institutional external actors in the EU system:

Figure 1 – EU foreign policy actors



Source: Own depiction, 2015

Looking at how EU foreign policy is actually ‘made’, one might be well-advised to start with the different instruments and resources at the EU’s disposal. Figure 2 summarizes the different policy tools, pertaining to the different competence areas. The EU budget relevant for external relations can be categorized according to different legal bases: under the community pillar there are the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI), the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), global initiatives such as the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights² and the EDF (European Development Fund – currently the 11th EDF, financed outside the EU budget by the MS, yet managed by the Commission); in addition, at the disposal of the EEAS there are the Instrument contributing to Peace and Stability (IcSP, formerly Instrument for Stability, IfS, managed by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments). In addition, the EU Parliament exercises a ‘droit de regard’ on CFSP and, since Lisbon, has full co-decision powers on all other aspects of the EU’s external action.

Financial means are defined in the multiannual financial framework (currently 2014-2020). In the area of foreign relations and development a distribution among third countries is worked-out, according to needs and areas of intervention, resulting in a number of country and thematic envelopes.

The instruments are depicted below:

Table 2 – EU foreign policy tools

² See: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sectors/human-rights-and-governance/peace-and-security/instrument-contributing-stability-and-peace_en; and: <http://www.eidhr.eu/>.

EU Foreign Policies toolbox with MENA

<p>Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) financed by MS budget</p> <p>Common Statements</p> <p>Sanctions</p> <p>Joint Actions</p>	<p>Cooperation tools with MENA financed by EU budget</p> <p>Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)</p> <p>European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (ENPI)</p> <p>Humanitarian assistance policy (ECHO)</p> <p>Global tools such as the EIDHR (i.e. Election Observation)</p> <p>Trade policy</p> <p>Instrument to contribute to peace and stability</p>	<p>Partnership with Industrialised countries financed by EU budget</p> <p>Instrument for cooperation with Industrialised Countries (ICI +)</p>
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Source: Own compilation 2015

The overall coordination of EU external policies is done by the External Action Service (EEAS) - a new service under the self-legitimation pressure to demonstrate its value-added to achieve a coherent external policy. It thus has to combine, on the one side, the intergovernmental Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), defined and elaborated by the member states via the Political and Security Committee (PSC) and the EU Military Committee (EUMC), with, on the other side, the external instruments of neighbourhood, development, humanitarian and trade policies, all within the remit of the Commission.

The implementation of EU action, which in the present cases is predominantly situated under the umbrella of aid and development, is also mostly done by Commission officials, attached to EU Delegations in third countries. In more detail, policy and action are distributed in the following way across the two competence areas:

'Accidental power' Europe?

The EU measures adopted under the intergovernmental CFSP structures, such as sanctions or civilian and military crisis management are supported and implemented by supranational EU institutions and decisions in the areas of commercial policies, internal market, trade and finance. The supply of these underlying governance resources and low-politics capacities also equips the EU with actorness in foreign policy and contributes to its status and role as a small/soft/normative etc. or an 'accidental power'.

Also in other regional and political contexts, the EU has drawn on from its 'conventional' governance capacities to enter the arenas of power politics or to become, e.g., the most prominent promoter of regional integration worldwide (Beeson 2005, Murray 2010), by actively encouraging and directly supporting such processes, but also by creating secondary incentives and indirect benefits for adopting 'EU-like' or EU-compatible structures in a mimetic fashion (parallel to 'external governance', Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2008). Supranational competences and the community method in decision-making about 'low politics' (trade, market, economy and finance, agriculture) become the

force of implementation and the organizational infrastructure for EU foreign and security policy action, or ‘high politics’.

By defining and framing groups of countries as ‘neighbourhood countries’ or ‘neighbours of neighbours’, and treating them like a (subaltern) region of gradual association, the EU contributes to shape identities and to exercises an influence on political allegiances (East vs. West, Judeo-Christian vs. Muslim countries, fundamentalist regimes vs. secular democracies). The EU has been trying to reconstruct MENA as a region and according to its own image, along the lines of ‘shared or preferred values’ (Pace 2014: 974). During many years, the EU has been projecting its own values, superficially conceived, disguising the underlying interests governing the relationships with a series of pre-revolutionary, authoritarian regimes – interests such as stability and security, maintaining the status quo, containing of illegal migration, trade, and flow of natural resources (gas and oil). “In reality, the EU ensured its economic interests in the MENA were secured through its endorsements of authoritarian regimes at the expense of addressing the MENA people’s claims for their rights and freedoms” (Pace 2014: 974).

For systemic reasons, it is no coincidence that the EU has adopted an expansionist approach also in its external action, including the ENP. The EU’s administrative capacities have an inherent organizational bias for task expansion, incessantly launching initiatives, claiming and taking on ever new competences and responsibilities. A potential institutional lock-in and pro-integrationist bias of supranational EU institutions at the central EU-level has been detected earlier. Other than a competitive pressure for budget maximization between organizational sub-units, i.e. between the Commission and the EEAS, creating an opportunity structure favouring pro-active policy positions, all of the EU’s supranational institutions are driving cooperation through offering advice and incentives to adopt the Union’s rules (external governance effects) with the prospect to gain better access to the single market and benefit from the effects of the EU’s zone of economic prosperity and stability. This effect has been shown to lead to a permanent exercise of adaptation pressures, attraction and gradual absorption/co-optation of neighbourhood states/neighbouring countries. Previous studies (author, forthcoming 2015) have demonstrated how the Union’s ‘low politics’ activities and instruments (pre-accession strategy, economic assistance, external governance etc.) has shown to build up momentum and have – at times paradoxical – effects in areas of ‘high politics’, as security and defence.

Conclusions and recommendations

The gist of the argument presented here was that ENP activities (the EU’s entrepreneurialism in the Middle-East, e.g. Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Syria, the North African countries – despite considerable setbacks) are rooted in the supranationalist bias inherent in the institutional logics (working-dynamics) of the EU external action administration (EEAS and relevant Commission services). Even though member states remain the principal actors behind the EU’s foreign and security policy also the specific organizational characteristics of the EU’s new external affairs administration influences policy design and implementation. International bureaucracies, such as the European External Action Service (EEAS), put in charge of coordinating, devising and conducting EU outward directed policies, may bias administrative decision-making and introduce a supranational action orientation, such as a predilection for integrated, supranationally coordinated and ‘joined-up’ or ‘comprehensive’ approaches, into the process of EU preference formation (Henökl 2015, Henökl and Trondal 2015, Simon 1972). Such a latent supranational orientation may play an increasingly important role in combination with a ‘high-politics’ component of EU-relations to the MENA and the Arab world.

The review of the EU neighbourhood policy that will be presented in November 2015 should be seen as and should form an integral part of the EU's Global Strategy. The new ENP, with a focus on bilateral relations and concrete areas of cooperation, promoting 'differentiation' and 'flexibility' of EU activities, will unavoidably cement the split between countries as well as the Eastern and Southern neighbourhoods, although keeping both in one overarching 'pro-forma' framework. As for the Southern neighbourhood, Europe's ambitions will be adapted to the new realities and a number of painful lessons need to be carefully studied: The EU's democracy promotion agenda has contributed to destabilization and radicalization. Europe is unable to spread its model and extend its zone of prosperity in the region. The key-concepts are 'differentiation', 'flexibility' and 'pragmatism'. The ENP will need to differentiate and adopt more targeted approaches, offering aid, cooperation and market access (via 'Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements', DCFTA) to those countries that are willing and able to embark on a reform path, e.g. Tunisia. With other countries the EU is likely to very pragmatically cooperate on individual initiatives on a case by case basis, including the areas of humanitarian and development aid, service provision, migration. The grand strategy of promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law will if not be abandoned altogether need to be scaled down to size, as expression of a new *Realpolitik* in the MENA region.

An EU Global Strategy would have to clearly outline the priorities for all fields of external action and develop a 'full-spectrum EU diplomacy' (Smith 2013: 664) or an 'integrative' diplomacy (Hocking et al. 2012), guide other Commissioners and provide a clear direction. In other words, this global strategy ought to be an overarching approach, including and integrating other strategies, reform and review processes. This holistic view seems to be missing at this point of time. Surprisingly, the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are but mentioned at the margins, and only with reference to development cooperation. This may indicate neglect of the SDGs in the Brussels' foreign policy community, rather putting the focus on a *security* strategy. As opposed, the SDGs could become an important reference point for the EU's overall external action, reflected the Global Strategy and related, ongoing review processes (EU 2020, EU sustainability strategy, trade review, European consensus on development, EEAS review). In order to achieve this, leadership by HRVP Mogherini and President Juncker would be required, mobilizing support for SDG by the extended group of external relations Commissioners as well as of the member states. The SDGs could be the way to substantially improve coherence across foreign policy areas, and provide common vision and guidance for frequently isolated efforts, following the silo-logics of separate portfolios. Otherwise, even President Juncker's recently announced Africa-fund runs the risk to become a drop in the ocean.

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