

## The future of values in the EU Global Strategy 2020

**Maryna Rabinovych** | LL.M (Hamburg) and PhD Candidate at the University of Hamburg.

**Zuzana Reptova** (nèe Novakova) | PhD researcher at the Erasmus University Rotterdam and associate expert at the East European Security Research Initiative.

### Theme

The revised version of the EU Global Strategy is to be released by the next High Representative, Josep Borrell. What potential is there for introducing a new focus on fundamental values in order to boost the EU's global role at a time of crisis for the international liberal order?

### Summary

In June 2019 the EU marked the third anniversary of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), adopted as a response both to the increasingly complex, contested and conflict-prone external environment and to internal divisions that threaten the coherence of the EU's external action. Compared with the initial 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS), the EUGS's distinctive features encompass an explicit recourse to the EU's self-interest and the downscaling of the transformative ambitions of the EU's foreign policy. As opposed to the ESS, the EUGS has been 'more conscious of the limits, imposed by our own capabilities and by others' intractability', and more specific about the EU's strategic priorities ('Security and Defence', 'Building State and Societal Resilience', 'Integrated Approach to Conflicts and Crises', 'Cooperative Regional Orders', 'A Rules-Based Governance' and 'Public Diplomacy'). According to the recent report on the implementation of the EUGS, a sharp focus on the EU's vital interests and strategic priorities, listed above, helped the Union achieve considerable progress in a number of foreign policy domains, ranging from defence to countering external crises. Furthermore, as exemplified by the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the launch of the EUGS has also been conducive to foreign and security policy integration among the Member States. However, to further promote a 'stronger Europe in a fragile world', in light of new intra-EU and external developments, Josep Borrell, the new HR/VP, will have to review the EUGS.

We argue that the EUGS 2020 would benefit from a new emphasis on values and a more open and elaborate position on 'principled pragmatism' (a concept introduced by the EUGS to 'reconcile' the EU's self-interest and its normative commitments). To substantiate this argument, we follow several steps. First, we analyse the extent to which the EUGS has offered a 'paradigm change' with regard to the EU's external value-promotion and the interplay between values and self-interest. Next, we look at the demand for a more normative EU, as expressed both within and outside the Union, with regard to the different domains of its external action. Finally, we explain how the renewed

emphasis on values and a clearly shaped interplay between fundamental values and self-interest can boost the EU's role as a global player against the background of a crisis of the international liberal order.

## Analysis

### (1) The EUGS 2016: 'paradigm change' with a 'pinch of compromise'

Back in 2003 the European Security Strategy (ESS) was quite optimistic about the global 'progressive spread of the rule of law and democracy', enabling authoritarian regimes to transform into 'secure, stable and dynamic democracies'. Over a decade later, the EU Global Strategy (EUGS), in sharp contrast, pointed to the increasing complexity and strife in the international environment, and has been widely regarded as embodying the 'paradigm change' in the worldview behind the EU's foreign policy. The 2016 EUGS's express reference to self-interest and the emphasis on 'security and defence' as the EU's top priority testify to the Union's primary concern about its ontological security rather than the external projection of its values. A similar argument can be made concerning the EUGS's novel concept of *resilience* that stresses the local ownership of state-building and dealing with risks, rather than the virtue of transplanting European values into a foreign context. The ultimate aim of external action seems to have shifted from building an area of shared stability and prosperity based on common values ('a safer Europe in a better world') towards security through pragmatic interconnection, specifically in areas of interest to EU domestic security ('EU Global Strategy starts at home'). Furthermore, both the substance of the EUGS's strategic priorities and the wording of the achievements in the 2019 Report by Federica Mogherini show that the EU is, first and foremost, seeking a new level of ambition in the security and defence domains, as well as the promotion of multilateralism to counter global fragmentation and strife. In effect, the EUGS and the recent progress report portray democracy, the rule of law and human rights not as values in themselves but as components of the EU's peace-, resilience- and multilateralism-building agenda.

As a slight compromise, there is a hint of an idea of 'principled pragmatism', ie, of finding some middle ground between self-interest and values. Acknowledging that 'principled pragmatism' is important to embrace different axiological 'pathways, recipes and models', Special Advisor to HR/VP Nathalie Tocci pointed to 'international law and its underlying norms' as a benchmark for deciding what is acceptable for the EU. Elaborating on the resilience of states and societies in the Middle East, Mogherini addressed these priorities as complementary and non-substitutive in relation to democracy, human rights, the rule of law and sustainable development. Moreover, it was emphasised within the the 2019 Report that resilience should not mean 'supporting stability by condoning authoritarianism'. Nonetheless, the Report did not shed light on whether and how the EU applied 'principled pragmatism' in practice, or on the role of international law in 'reconciling' the EU's self-interest and values, predominantly focusing on the EUGS's value for the security of the Union and its citizens.

## (2) The 'why': why a new emphasis on values in the EUGS 2020?

### (2.1) *The demand for a more normative EU*

Does such a focus on self-interest and the securitisation of the EU's foreign policy mean that values lose their importance? The answer should most assuredly be 'no', since the demand for a more normative Union exists both internally and outside the EU. Whilst fearing uncontrolled migration and terrorism, the people of the EU continue considering 'the EU's respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law' one of the Union's key assets. Being confident that the EU, as a democratic actor, cannot ignore their yearning for stronger protection and border controls, EU citizens, nonetheless, view improving the situation in countries from which migrants come as a key long-term priority to be pursued by the EU. Interestingly enough, roughly a third of EU citizens distinguish democracy and human rights as the essentials of development cooperation. A slightly higher percentage of citizens underline that development cooperation is a 'moral obligation' for the EU, thus making visible the transpiring the idea of the EU as a 'force for good'. Contrary to the ever-louder populist claims, EU-wide opinion polls reveal that citizens tend to support a 'double-headed' and, whenever possible, non-contradictory strategy that allows the EU to be both a strong security provider and a normative player.

Externally, the polycentric global order inevitably becomes an arena of normative contestation and diversity that threatens to evolve into a normative chaos. Against the background of the US abstention from global liberal leadership (or even US action against the order it shaped and upheld), the EU has acquired a valuable chance to boost its role as a peaceful manager of normative diversity at its commencement. The EU's commitment to multilateralism was emphasised in the EUGS: as explained in more detail in the 2019 Report, such a commitment embraces support for the reform of multilateral institutions, investing in multilateral initiatives and implementing them. This is, however, not enough for the EU to engage in the ambitious mediation and management efforts required to deal with the normative diversity phenomenon. Instead, to be heard, EU action requires three components. First, as already partly implied in the interpretation of 'principled pragmatism' by Nathalie Tocci, it is important for the EU to position itself as a player, aware of the fact that contemporary multilateral cooperation requires the recognition of normative diversity, tolerance of divergent views and outstanding abilities to compromise and negotiate. Secondly, the EU should simultaneously continue positioning itself as a 'force for good', ie, a principled actor that, whilst becoming more reflective of surrounding normative diversity, observes its values. Such a stance inevitably includes making sure that one's own fundamental values are respected at home, within the Union. Thirdly, to be increasingly recognised as both a non-threatening 'force for good' and an actor with an outstanding capability to deal with normative diversity, the EU needs more clarity as regards the interplay of its values and interests, and the strategies to deal with the values-interests dilemma. In other words, a more pronounced response is needed to discourses, framing self-interest and values in 'either-or' terms. This can best be conceived at the level of specific contexts and issues rather than in grand abstractions.

### *(2.2) The EU still uses normative foreign policy instruments*

Apart from the people's demand for a more normative EU, an additional reason to be more open about the external projection of the EU's values is its continued application of a normative power's toolbox. Beyond the security and defence domain, one would be surprised to see that the EU actually continues using foreign policy instruments that remain to a great extent connected to its liberal value-oriented agenda, despite the alleged 'paradigm change' in the EUGS. The EU's strategic documents change the emphasis but often use old forms of action. For instance, the EU uses its ambitious market integration and rules-convergence agenda to promote non-trade-related goals such as labour and social rights (or, in terms of Ian Manners' classical normative power concept, uses the 'transference' pathway of value-promotion). So far, it is difficult to argue that the EU has become more effective in enforcing the respective obligations of partner countries, whilst lacking effective enforcement instruments, as exemplified by the EU-South Korea ongoing consultations on labour issues. Nevertheless, according to the 2017 and 2018 non-papers by the European Commission services, the EU will facilitate the development of new legal instruments to achieve a better enforcement of non-trade-related obligations in its FTAs with third countries. Furthermore, the EU continues putting much effort into the support of good governance-oriented reforms in partner countries (eg, multi-aspect public administration reforms with an emphasis on transparency and accountability), as exemplified by the case of the 'associated' Eastern Neighbourhood. Last but not least, closely linked to the EU's democracy, human rights and rule of law promotion agenda, civil society support remains one of the Union's key strategies to influence internal affairs abroad. For example, the EU's outreach and involvement with local civil society actors in the European Neighbourhood had a scope that was unprecedented by any other actor in development cooperation.

### *(2.3) Some areas of EU external action with a stronger emphasis on values*

This statement can be, *inter alia*, exemplified by the EU's trade and development policies. Whilst aspiring to 'tackle new economic realities' and being linked to the EU's strategic interests, the 2015 Commission's Communication 'Trade for All. Towards a More Responsive Trade and Investment Policy' devotes particular attention to the promotion of sustainable development, human rights, good governance and countering corruption through free trade agreements. In line with a commitment to democracy and human rights, the Commission's overall discourse highlights ambitions in shaping a more transparent, inclusive and responsive trade and investment policy. That would, in particular, include a stronger voice for the Member States, the European Parliament and civil society, and enhance consumer protection via regulatory cooperation.

In line with the 2030 Agenda –an ambitious consensus-based global development agenda–, the EU also stressed the links between its efforts, aimed at sustainable development, and the promotion of values, such as peace, the rule of law and human rights. Notably, before the introduction of the Agenda-based new European Consensus on Development in 2017, the EU's value-promotion activities tended to be separate from its development cooperation efforts.

### (3) The outlook and the 'how': what are the pathways to strengthening the values dimension of the EUGS 2020?

The 2016 EU Global Strategy has been the HR/VP's valuable effort to find a 'middle ground between overambitious liberal peacebuilding and under-ambitious stability'. It evidently brought about numerous tangible results, ranging from the launch of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) and the European Defence Fund to the implementation of ambitious assistance programmes for Syria and Ukraine. Nonetheless, having introduced an ambitious 'principled pragmatism' concept, the EUGS 2016 and a number of related reports did not shed light on the interplay between the EU's self-interest, its self-portrayal as a normative global actor and the role of normativity in pursuing its interests. At the same time, as explained above, values still matter (and, to our mind, should matter even more) for at least three interconnected reasons. First, whilst demanding a more inward-looking and secure Europe, EU citizens also wish it to be 'good', including its commitment to poverty eradication and peacebuilding. Secondly, boosting the EU's global role in the era of troubled multilateralism requires not just a pragmatic approach to reforms and investments but being recognised by others both as a legitimate 'force for good' in its own terms and an actor, respecting normative diversity and capable of managing it. Thirdly, despite declaring an emphasis on self-interest, the EU *de facto* uses the toolkit of a normative power and even strengthens its identity as a value-promoter in certain domains of its external action, with this development being virtually absent from the shaping of the EUGS 2016 and the 2019 Report.

Hence, it is a must for the EUGS 2020 to bring values back to play and adhere to them in a consistent manner, whilst aspiring to strengthen the EU's global role. We suggest four key steps for the new HR/VP to introduce an operational emphasis on values in the EUGS 2020: (1) having a clear commitment to being a 'force for good'; (2) being a manager and mediator of normative diversity; (3) a more nuanced explanation of what 'principled pragmatism' means; and (4) a 'nexus' approach to external action and policy coherence.

#### *(3.1) A clear commitment to being a 'force for good'*

Foremost, as the EUGS 2016 generated much uncertainty about the EU's intention to engage in 'Realpolitik', we recommend that the EUGS 2020 introduce a clear commitment for the EU to act as a 'force for good' on the international arena. Such a commitment shall not, however, preclude the EU's pursuit of self-interest via its foreign policy or, at the other extreme, express itself as a narcissistic power, positioning its values as an absolute for others. Instead, given the global trend towards the contesting of norms and the competition of ideas among different powers, the EU's normative commitment is to be initially marked by *the components of reflection and the readiness to consider and accept the values and views of others*. Here, *reflection* can be defined as an entity's ability to critically re-think its ideas and actions over time, and acknowledge the aspects of policies that could have been implemented in a better, more ethical or more cohesive way. In turn, the acceptance of others' values can serve as a foundation for the EU's chance to become a mediator/manager of normative diversity under the complex settings of modern multilateralism, as mentioned earlier and discussed later on.

### *(3.2) A manager and mediator of normative diversity*

Hence, positioning itself as a 'force for good' and a key proponent of the rules-based multilateral order, the EU has a chance of using its image and experience of managing a diversity of norms and views among Member States to mature as a global norms' diversity manager. An international actor's profound expertise in a particular field of international policy tends to benefit its power in the international arena, as repeatedly proved in the literature on 'middle powers'. Regardless of the EU's undoubted expertise in many aspects of international relations (eg, development cooperation and humanitarian aid), the relative novelty and sensitivity of the phenomenon of contesting norms raises the value of an expertise in managing normative diversity. In this respect, the EUGS 2020 should make a particular effort to bring together the EU's commitments to the diversity of views and norms, and its management, on the one hand, and the rules-based international order, on the other. Moreover, to gain respect as a power, capable of managing normative diversity, the EU should introduce a more straightforward and detailed explanation of its 'principled pragmatism' approach to reconciling values and self-interest.

### *(3.3) A more nuanced explanation of what 'principled pragmatism' means*

'Principled pragmatism' can beyond doubt be considered the most controversial concept introduced by the EUGS 2016. There have so far been no explanations on the practical application of 'principled pragmatism' apart from the suggestion mentioned above of using international law as a benchmark to reconcile 'pragmatism' and principles, as expressed by the Special Advisor to the current HR/VP Natalie Tocci. In turn, a more nuanced and, possibly, a more legalistic approach to 'principled pragmatism' (eg, designed in the spirit of the Court of Justice's [strategy to balance individual and community interest](#)) would contribute to the EU being perceived as a normative power, capable of solving complex dilemmas due to its strategically elaborate EUGS 2020.

### *(3.4) A 'nexus' approach to external action and policy coherence*

One of the trends that shapes modern policy-making on both the regional and international levels is the closer interconnectedness between issue areas, increasingly referred to as a 'nexus' approach. The application of the 'nexus' approach can best be exemplified by the 2030 Agenda and the [new European Consensus on Development](#), both of which underline the importance of detecting trade-offs and uncovering synergies between different issue areas and developing coherent policies to consider them. The proliferation of the 'nexus' philosophy behind the policy-making processes has led to values gradually 'seeping' into a variety of EU external policies, such as trade, regulatory cooperation and development. Against this background and [the criticism of the EU as a normative hegemon](#), we suggest that the EUGS 2020 strategise the normative effects of the entire spectrum of its external policies, thus further enhancing the coherence of its external policies.

## **Conclusions**

Ultimately, the combination of the four steps outlined above would help the EUGS 2020 bring values back to play and strengthen the EU's image of a normative power that is, nonetheless, not hegemonic, but inclined to accept normative differences and reflect on its own action.