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**POLICY
BRIEF**

REBOOTING EU FOREIGN POLICY

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SUMMARY

Geopolitics is back, and the crises in Ukraine and the Middle East have underlined how poorly equipped the European Union is to respond. The new foreign policy leadership will have to contend not only with a world in which Europe's weight is greatly diminished, but also with a reluctance at the heart of the EU to face reality. The culture of denial is exemplified by such favourite EU constructs as "Europe's neighbourhood", "strategic partners", and "the comprehensive approach". Each of these has been allowed to become a substitute for real strategic thought – and has encouraged a lethal complacency about the effectiveness of the EU's external policies.

The new High Representative, Federica Mogherini, has a golden chance to initiate a comprehensive strategic debate, and to reboot the Union's foreign policy; the European Council has, indeed, issued just such a mandate. Meanwhile, there will be opportunities to signal a fresh start and a new direction – and we offer an illustrative menu of possibilities, to do so, from organising a major conference on security and reform in North Africa with all key regional stakeholders to establishing an Economic Statecraft Directorate. We also suggest ways to re-engage member states through a new division of labour between Brussels and national capitals, starting with joint trips, for instance to Kyiv with the Weimar group, and establishing small, informal working groups with select EU foreign ministers to prepare some of the EU's key policy dossiers.

If the euro crisis was the biggest challenge facing the European Union after it chose its new leadership five years ago, today it is geopolitics that is dominating the headlines. And just as the travails of the euro challenged many of the EU's core economic assumptions, today's troubles are calling into question many of the core assumptions of EU foreign policy.

The last few months have shown that the European Neighbourhood Policy is no answer to the chaos on Europe's southern or eastern borders; that Russia and China are not becoming "responsible stakeholders" of the established world order; that the United States is not willing to act indefinitely as a global policeman; and that great powers in both Europe and Asia are willing to use the threat of force and hybrid wars to achieve political goals. The changing of the guard in Brussels coincides with the fraying – not to say unravelling – of the liberal international order that the West has been able to impose on much of the globe since at least the Second World War.

And, just as in the euro crisis, the management of these complex policy crises has been hampered by divisions between member states. This partly explains the relative absence of the EU institutions from some of today's most pressing foreign policy issues, from the battle over Syria to the fall-out from Ukraine.

Today, EU foreign policy discourse is increasingly divorced from reality, and it has a decreasing influence on how

member states in practice conduct their foreign policies. There is an urgent need and a unique opportunity for the new leadership of the EU to reboot European foreign policy.

First, they need to set out a vision of the challenges that the EU faces and engage EU member states in a discussion about how to resolve them. The biggest opportunity from the EU's 2007 Lisbon Treaty is that policy and strategy could be made to drive the use of the Union's foreign policy tools, rather than the other way around. A key part of achieving this will be to ditch some of the unhelpful concepts of the past and to agree on some overarching priorities.

Secondly, the new team should develop some symbolic interventions that show a new seriousness of intent on these questions.

Thirdly, they need to craft a new relationship between the EU institutions and member states on the big issues, based around a new division of labour.

This policy brief suggests some ideas for how to move forward in these three areas. There will be no shortage of advice in the new High Representative's inbox.¹ But we hope to offer a rather more distanced perspective on a number of key issues that the EU will have to face in 2015, and to supply some concrete recommendations that should provide the new EU foreign policy team with some early momentum, as well as an opportunity to indicate a direction of travel.

Setting out a vision for Europe: Cutting through the cant

The HR/VP will occupy a position of more responsibility than power. But her office is at least what Teddy Roosevelt would term a "bully pulpit": a great platform to establish a common understanding of the challenges that Europe faces in the world and to lay out a vision to member states as well as to the wider European publics, and indeed to the rest of the world. The HR/VP has inherited a mandate to report to the European Council next year on "changes in the global environment" and "challenges and opportunities arising for the Union".² This gives her a golden chance to conduct a comprehensive EU foreign policy review, that could be comprehensive in terms both of coverage and of participation.

The "changes in the global environment" since last the EU had a serious think about external strategy – in the months leading up to adoption of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) – have been astounding.³ The multipolar world has become a reality. Western hegemony is finished. And the flow of power to the east and south seems set to

continue. Some (rather good) future-gazing work conducted co-operatively by the EU institutions underlines how much further Europe's relative power is likely to decline – and therefore how much harder Europeans will have to work to maintain the sort of global influence, and the levels of security and prosperity, that they prefer to take for granted.⁴

When Baroness Ashton started her job five years ago, the Foreign Affairs Council agreed on a trinity of goals for European foreign policy: the neighbourhood; relations with strategic partners; and crisis management with the so-called comprehensive approach.⁵ But what was five years ago embraced by everyone as a constructive framework for engaging the world has become a barrier to clear thinking today. After the Arab uprisings and the Ukraine crisis in the neighbourhood, the experience of Russian and Chinese behaviour in Crimea, the Asian maritime disputes, and the horror of Syria, this framework has been shown to be more likely to foster complacency than solutions. The starting point for the review of the EU's foreign policy should therefore be to engage the member states in a discussion about how much each of these three frameworks has been overtaken by events.

Europe's neighbourhood

The "neighbourhood" concept has dominated the EU's foreign policy thinking ever since the ESS. When the ESS was written, with the Balkan wars fresh in memory, its authors pointed out that "it is in the European interest that countries on our borders are well-governed."⁶ It has produced the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), and a plethora of "instruments", or spending programmes, to support it. Yet the ENP has not been a success.

Even before the Arab Awakening turned sour and Russia annexed Crimea, there was a growing consensus on the flaws in the policy: it was too Eurocentric, it was too technocratic and instrument-driven, it brigaded together 16 countries with no obvious common features other than proximity, it was too self-regarding (that is, it assumed a desire on the part of our neighbours to become "more like us" that is in fact generally absent, even if they certainly want more of what we have got) – and it was all attempted on the cheap. (The "3Ms" of money, markets, and mobility that framed the EU response to the Arab Awakening were well chosen, but they were exactly what we were not prepared to provide on any decisive scale.) The EU has now agreed to conduct a review of the policy that will almost certainly result in much greater differentiation as well as a disaggregation of the south from the east.

¹ Strictly, Federica Mogherini's job title will be High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Policy and Security Policy/Vice-President of the European Commission – hereafter, HR/VP.

² Conclusions of the 19/20 December 2013 European Council, EUCO 217/13, p. 4, available at http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/ec/140245.pdf.

³ "A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy", European Council, 12 December 2003, available at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/78367.pdf> (hereafter, ESS).

⁴ The work of the European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) can be seen at their website, <http://europa.eu/espas/>.

⁵ Civil Military Co-ordination 14457/03, Brussels, 7 November 2003, available at <http://register.consilium.europa.eu/doc/srv?l=EN&f=ST%2014457%202003%20INIT>.

⁶ ESS, p. 7.

However, the problem runs deeper than a failed policy. Endless discussion of “our neighbourhood” has deluded us into believing that Europe has some special power and perhaps even responsibility in relation to these countries. And, of course, to some limited extent it does. But recent events have brutally underlined those limits – particularly in relation to the convulsions across the Middle East and North Africa, where our role has been almost entirely one of a helpless bystander. Meanwhile, to the east, our “neighbourhood” delusions have led us to send confusing signals about the real extent of our readiness to embrace or defend countries that want to move towards us. It has been no service to Ukrainians to encourage them to believe that the EU, or indeed NATO, can or will alter the reality of their vulnerability to Russian power.

So the “neighbourhood” concept claims too much – and it also claims too little. By focusing attention on our implied special role near at hand, it has encouraged the tacit view that “the neighbourhood” is unconditionally important to us, along with our self-identification as a regional power. In a globalised world, this conclusion is a strategic error. Yes, geographical proximity brings with it both the ties and the problems of migration. It also matters if you want to receive your energy through pipelines. But in other respects, such as trade and investment, the countries of the neighbourhood are of relatively little importance to us. Their strategic importance should be measured by the choices their societies make and their ability to adapt to globalisation. Our neighbours are not coming powers, but often struggling states – which, it turns out, we can, or at least will, do relatively little to help. There is no good reason to focus our attention on the neighbourhood as a broad geographical term, as opposed to, say, Asia, where the real “challenges and opportunities” for Europe are to be found.

Recent Brussels talk of “the neighbours’ neighbours” suggests that this realisation is beginning to spread. “Europe’s neighbourhood” is a simple category error: it is time to abandon the one-size-fits-all policy, and disaggregate our approach (and our funding) into individual country and/or regional (such as the Maghreb) policies. And to broaden the focus, Tunisia and Libya should interest us not just in themselves but as the leading edge of all the pressures and preoccupations we can expect in coming years from Africa, which is heading for explosive population growth. Moreover, the EU’s post-2011 framing for its engagement with North Africa – supporting democratic transitions – is no longer adequate. It should be replaced with a new agenda that integrates all the EU’s major concerns, covering the Sahel as well as the Mediterranean countries. And we need to explore ways to develop common agendas with other regional powers.

Strategic Partners

This is a favourite Brussels categorisation – even though, as the European Parliamentary Research Service has pointed out, no definition of the term seems to exist, nor is there even an authoritative list of who the EU’s “strategic partners” are.⁷ In practice, a strategic partner seems to be anyone beyond the ambit of “Europe’s neighbourhood” who is too big to ignore. But embracing this terminology is not just sloppy, but insidiously dangerous as well. For, to the extent that it has any meaning, the term connotes a) that the EU is no threat to anyone – a nice, “herbivorous power”; and b) that whatever differences it might seem to have with others elsewhere, “we all at bottom want stability and prosperity, and so can surely find space for co-operation on that basis”.⁸

But the evidence is that the rest of the world does not necessarily share our priorities, or want what we want. Nationalism, or religion, may dictate policy in a way that we have forgotten about in Europe. Many, if not most, leaders around the world put a higher premium on power than on stability and prosperity – whether power for themselves and their relations, clients, or sects, or national power. We may want, for example, to be surrounded by a ring of well-governed countries; Vladimir Putin evidently wants to be surrounded by a ring of conflicts, frozen or otherwise, or at least by compliant autocrats. As Federica Mogherini has argued, we must recognise that Russia can no longer be seen as a strategic partner.⁹ Indeed, no one could read Putin’s speech on the annexation of Crimea without recognising his settled hostility to the West, and to the EU.¹⁰

The EU’s attachment to a “partnership” view of the world goes some way towards explaining its failure to anticipate a Russian reaction when Ukraine opted for the European path last autumn. As the strategist General Sir Rupert Smith has emphasised, a cardinal military rule is to expect your opponent to do everything he can to disrupt your campaign plan – and be ready to adapt your plan accordingly.¹¹ But this advice is wasted if you refuse to acknowledge the existence of a rival in the first place. Now, as the crisis continues, the West needs to think hard about what it will do if Putin ups the ante by, for example, destabilising the western Balkans.

This is not of course to say that one cannot continue to do business with an adversary – through selling and buying gas, for example, though hopefully in decreasing quantities. And all parties should certainly continue to talk. Perhaps they should even talk more, when immediate tensions subside: the EU might usefully engage with the Russia-sponsored

⁷ “EU Strategic Partnerships with third countries”, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2 October 2012, available at <http://epthinktank.eu/2012/10/02/eu-strategic-partnerships-with-third-countries/>.

⁸ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, “New World Order: the balance of soft power and the rise of herbivorous powers”, ECFR, 24 October 2007, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/balance_of_soft_power_report/.

⁹ “Mogherini: Russia is no longer the EU’s strategic partner”, *EurActiv*, 2 September 2014, available at <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/mogherini-russia-no-longer-eus-strategic-partner-308152>.

¹⁰ Vladimir Putin, “Address by President of the Russian Federation”, 18 March 2014, available at <http://eng.kremlin.ru/news/6889>.

¹¹ General Sir Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World* (London: Allen Lane, 2005), p. 13 et seq.

Eurasian Union. But we should not, clearly, hasten to let bygones be bygones. The EU should make it its business to ensure that Crimea hangs like a legal and economic albatross around Russia's neck for many years to come.

The “strategic partner” label is similarly unhelpful when applied to the EU's relationship with China. To say this is not, of course, to advocate an adversarial relationship, either. It is merely to suggest taking a clear-eyed view of the ruthless, energetic, authoritarian, state-capitalist power that is extending its global reach and influence – economic, diplomatic, and, increasingly, military – at an astonishing speed, not least into Europe itself. The West's hope that economic development would make the Chinese “more like us” has been comprehensively exploded. We are instead dealing with a new superpower whose values are different from ours, and many of whose interests are in direct competition with our own (for example, over access to natural resources). It is, moreover, a power that is quite prepared to resort to military intimidation of its neighbours and economic coercion of those further afield, including Europeans – whether by forbidding contact with the Dalai Lama, by stealing Western technology, or by skewing the commercial playing-field through protection of its massive government procurement.

None of this is to argue against the immense benefits that we obtain – that we need – from our relations with China, nor to question the importance of engaging with it more closely in its role as global power rather than merely source of cash. But it does argue for a shrewder view of the relationship: a more careful assessment of where our interests are bound to clash, and a less ostrich-like view of the political tensions in East and South-East Asia. War in the region could devastate European economies in a way that all the bloodletting in the Middle East has so far failed to even approach. And a less cosy view of this leviathan “strategic partner” might also remind us of the benefits, economic and geostrategic, that might accrue from developing balancing relations with other regional powers.

The facile “strategic partner” can also be a deceptive label even when applied where it plainly fits – notably, to the United States. As with China, American power dazzles us, and the EU member states have long been as jealous of their sovereign right to compete against each other for favour in Washington as they now are in Beijing. And in this instance, with more excuse – the last century's deal, whereby the US gave us protection and a junior role in the partnership that ran the world in exchange for our foreign policy support was highly beneficial for Europeans. But a changed world, and in particular the US insistence that Europeans take on more responsibility for their own security as America retracts and refocuses on the Pacific, calls for a recalibration of the transatlantic relationship.

In some respects, the need is for an even closer partnership. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), if well designed to preserve enough policy space for the EU,

could not only boost growth on both sides of the Atlantic through greater economic integration, but could also bring strategic benefits to both parties, strengthening their mutual ability to write the rules of world trade and technological development. The next global standards of mobile telephony will not be American or European; they will be Transatlantic, or they will be Chinese. This is the Great Game of the future, and one that matters desperately to Europeans, vulnerable as they are to the undercutting of their manufacturing and, increasingly, their service industries if they lose the power to set the environmental, health, and other standards to which the globalised economy operates.

Elsewhere, Europe's habitual deference to US foreign policy badly needs a rethink, especially where American policies spring from domestic politics. For example, President Barack Obama has been smart enough to abandon the Global War on Terror – but only as a title, not as a substantive policy. A country traumatised by 9/11 requires no less; and drone strikes and assassinations give some protection from political opponents' charges of “weakness”. But there is no reason for Europeans to embrace such a Manichaean worldview, or to consider developments in the Middle East solely through the “fight against terrorism” prism. Countering extremism should be a European priority – but we must also avoid slipping back into support of local strong men who promise stability, and of being party to a “clash of civilisations” with the Islamic world.

These points bear most immediately on the part Europeans should play in international efforts to combat the Islamic State (IS). If a prime goal of policy is to avoid terrorism at home, then direct European military involvement, even if only in airstrikes in Iraq, risks proving counterproductive. IS thrives on the resentments that attract recruits (and which could focus them, in a way that they currently are not, on the enemies further afield). Their containment and eventual elimination will be achieved only by the regional powers. Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, and the others are going to have to find their own *modus vivendi*. Continued excessive outside ownership of the region's conflicts, including the struggle against IS in Syria and Iraq, will only postpone the need for regional actors to make their own hard choices and encourage them to look to us for solutions and, later, with blame.

Europe, with its greater willingness to talk to Iran, can complement US diplomatic efforts here – the wider the regional co-operation over IS, the better the chance of a Syria solution emerging too. And, though they are doing much already, both European interests and values will be served by a larger and more conspicuous effort on the humanitarian front.

Elsewhere in the Middle East, Europeans should by now have realised that such is Israel's influence in the US Congress that the notion of America delivering Israel in peace negotiations with the Palestinians is fatuous. This implies the need for Europe to start thinking and acting for

itself on such specifics as the Quartet arrangements; the dismissal of Hamas as a mere terrorist organisation; and indulgence of the Abdel Fattah el-Sisi regime in Cairo.

One could go on – Narendra Modi’s India, for example, promises a whole new set of challenges and opportunities. And there are other vital, strategic relationships to rethink which are not just with individual powers – with the Gulf Cooperation Council, for example, or with the African continent as a whole. But the general point is that Europe needs to start thinking strategically about other powers, and it can begin by admitting that not everyone is a “partner”.

The Comprehensive Approach

Our final example of self-deluding and harmful sloganeering is the “comprehensive approach” to crisis management. As with the earlier examples, it is the subtext of the phrase, rather than its ostensible meaning, that does the damage. On the face of it, this much-referenced policy is just a rather banal truism: that security and development are interdependent. It is also interpreted as reflecting the equally obvious point

that when a number of different EU institutions are engaged in the same area, they had better co-ordinate their aims and actions (the Lisbon Treaty created the HR/VP post precisely in recognition of this need).

A decade ago when the slogan was coined, there may well have been people involved in crisis management (though not the military themselves) who believed that sending in the troops could be an adequate answer. No one makes that mistake any more. But instead, the “comprehensive approach” is now invoked to make the opposite argument: not that armed force can do everything, but rather that it can do little or nothing – and that certainly it is not a necessary part of the EU’s aspiration to contribute more to global security if the EU is applying the other “instruments” at its disposal, that is, administering advice and money.

The comprehensive approach thus serves to devalue the military instrument – one of the most effective in Europe’s external relations toolkit – and feeds the belief that interventionism was an aberration now best forgotten. Yet by focusing on long-term engagement and the tasks of stabilisation and reconstruction, it is also pointing

Making the most of the bully pulpit: New departures for the HR

General

- Announce a plan for a wide-ranging, comprehensive, and inclusive review of the EU’s external strategy, hung on the mandate from the December 2013 European Council.
- Establish an Economic Statecraft Directorate with shared staff from the EEAS and the Commission. This should include a sanctions bureau to oversee this burgeoning area of policy-making, to monitor enforcement, and to develop clearer guidelines on when and how to lift as well as impose sanctions and coercive financial measures.

Southern Neighbourhood

- Disaggregate the southern neighbourhood from the east.
- Convene a major conference on security, development, and reform in North Africa involving all key regional actors.
- Coordinate an EU response on Ebola commensurate with the new US effort, including medical capabilities and an immediate and massive aid commitment.

Russia and Wider Europe

- Anticipate this winter’s gas crisis and plan how to deal with it.
- Prepare response options to further Russian escalation/retaliation in eastern Europe and even the western Balkans.

- Be ready to de-escalate with Moscow, for example by engaging with the Eurasian Union.
- Keep Russia on the economic and legal hook for Crimea.

China

- Push for a common European front against technology theft and trade distortion.
- Engage China on third-party issues such as Pakistan, Africa, and Iran.
- Prioritise strategic dialogue with other Asian powers including Japan and India.

Transatlantic

- Tighten the transatlantic economic partnership: push for the right TTIP.
- Diverge as necessary from US foreign policy lines, especially in the Middle East (over, for example, Israel/Palestine and attitudes to the Sisi regime in Egypt).
- Complement US efforts against IS with regional diplomacy (Iran) and humanitarian aid.

Comprehensive Approach

- Appoint a CSDP Review Commission.
- Get good military advice in the HR/VP cabinet.

Europeans towards precisely those sorts of nation-building missions which the West discovered, in Iraq and Afghanistan, to be beyond its powers.

Thus, the doctrine of the comprehensive approach has provided a smokescreen behind which the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has virtually collapsed. The vaunted battle group rapid reaction forces are terminally discredited after the latest failures to deploy them in the Mali and Central African Republic crises. In both cases France intervened alone, hoping for subsequent EU support – initiating a saga of buck-passing and foot-dragging (five months to get 700 peacekeepers into CAR capital Bangui to secure the airport) which has cast into shameful relief the determination of most member states to minimise any actual use of their militaries that could involve either risk or operational expenditure.

Now, under pressure from the US, the EU has declared a new CSDP mission to support Ukraine – involving a handful of civilian advisers and an initial budget of less than €3 million. Intended presumably as a signal of support, the symbolism is actually of an uncertainty of purpose so complete that the EU cannot even decide to do nothing.

As matters stand, the CSDP is doing more harm than good – to the EU's reputation, and to the contribution to global security that member states might otherwise be making under the more effective auspices of the UN, or simply as coalitions of the willing. Increasingly, the argument is heard that as a European “growing-up” project it has failed, and that it is time to place ourselves again under US direction in NATO – where now, of course, American pressure will push Europeans to stand more on their own feet in security and defence affairs. The time has come to appoint a blue-ribbon CSDP Review Commission to take a hard look at the state of the policy; to assess whether it is worth reviving; and, if so, to recommend how.

A New Deal between the EU institutions and the member states

In our 2007 Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations we wrote that “Russia has emerged as the most divisive issue in the European Union since Donald Rumsfeld split the European club into ‘new’ and ‘old’ member states”.¹² Seven years later, the EU is much more able to respond to Russia, but the tensions and balancing act between member states confirms the continued difficulty of agreeing and holding a common line. The tensions over Russia are equalled by those that have hampered the EU's response to Syria and wider Middle East crises. And the growing mercantilism of national capitals has also prevented them from uniting around a common and strategic line on China. With the

financial and economic crisis far from over, introspection, defensiveness, and mutual resentments colour the outlooks of too many member states.

Crises bring the member states together, herding for protection. But, aside from emergencies, the presumption in favour of joint European responses to external challenges no longer exists. For their different reasons, none of the “big three” – France, Germany, and the UK – is reliably available to rally European action. A decade ago, when London, Paris, and Berlin put together a joint approach on the Iran nuclear file or Poland and Lithuania led on the Orange Revolution, national capitals would be sure to involve High Representative Javier Solana, as a symbol and focus of European unity. But this behaviour seems to be receding. The Weimar foreign ministers travelled to Kyiv to work on the Ukraine crisis without any representative of EU institutions, while France and the UK have sought to push forward an agenda on Syria without involving Brussels. The big member states seem to prefer Brussels to confine itself to the unimportant and/or intractable, and to formulating principled positions to which they can subscribe, as cover for their pursuit of their own national agendas.

Meanwhile, the Brussels institutions have tended to avoid high salience issues where Europe was divided for fear of being crushed by the fighting elephants – preferring to carve out a space where they could make a difference. This has sometimes been achieved to striking effect – such as in the recent agreement between Serbia and Kosovo. But this narrow focus on a few specific priorities has contrasted with the absence of European unity, or even EU advocacy of such unity, on the big strategic issues.

This fragmentation of the EU does not just go against the hopes of the Lisbon Treaty – it is often self-defeating. One of the problems of member states going it alone is that it makes it more difficult to leverage the potential power of the European Union. Some of the most effective action comes from the EU's market (through sanctions or trade deals); its aid (much of which is controlled by Brussels); and its ability to focus on issues over time. These are all things that are difficult for national capitals to unlock. However, national capitals also hold the keys. Because the post of HR/VP involves more responsibility than power, alongside an impossible workload, it can succeed only with the active backing of all the other centres of foreign policy authority in Brussels, and in the member states.

Jean-Claude Juncker's restructuring of the European Commission, whereby Mogherini is given official oversight of many of the relevant portfolios, notably including Trade, prompts the hope that she will get more backing from the Commission President than did her predecessor. Both Juncker and European Council President Donald Tusk will have daily opportunities to build up the HR/VP's authority, by allowing her profile and scope – and they should take these opportunities.

¹² Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, “A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations”, ECFR, 7 November 2007, available at http://www.ecfr.eu/content/entry/eu_russia_relations/.

Member states, especially at the foreign minister level, can make the HR/VP's burden lighter simply by approaching the Foreign Affairs Council with a predisposition to engage constructively – and can share the burden if, as she should, she deputises some of them to work particular issues for her. From Mogherini's perspective, she has a number of tools to establish a new way of working with the member states.

First, she should agree a programme of joint trips with some of the key foreign ministers to different regions: for example, a joint trip to Kyiv with the Weimar group, or a trip to Erbil with the main humanitarian donors.

Secondly, she should try to tap into the talents of member states by establishing small, informal working groups with some EU foreign ministers to prepare some of the EU's key policy dossiers. The composition of such groups would depend partly on personalities, and partly on which member states have dogs in which fights. It would also be important to remember that EU solidarity might be enhanced (and the broader European interest better served) by having some foreign ministers, perhaps on a reciprocal basis, work on issues other than their particular national priorities. The practice recently pioneered by Poles and Spaniards of co-operating on certain foreign policy issues, combining their different regional perspectives, should be encouraged.

Thirdly, and perhaps in the context of the major stock-take of EU foreign policy which we urge the HR/VP to initiate, it is time for some franker discussions about which issues can and should be subjected to the discipline of common approaches, and which must be left to national capitals. Nothing, for example, is going to stop the member states competing against each other for commercial advantage in China and in the Gulf; but that reality need not rule out some elements of common strategy, as suggested above. And the divisive effects of competition could be mitigated by greater mutual transparency and accountability.

For all the limitations and distractions of the role, the HR/VP post is not without its resources. The Lisbon Treaty may reserve the power of decision-making in the common foreign and security policies to the member states; but it gives the HR/VP the right to propose and to implement – along with the chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee and its subordinate bodies. In other words, to the extent that events do not, the HR/VP can set the EU's foreign policy agenda.

The analysis above is peppered with illustrations of specific steps that we advocate as part of establishing a European foreign policy that looks credible to the outside world, as well as to Europeans themselves. However, our purpose here is not to offer a comprehensive playbook, but merely to urge the case for a European foreign policy worth the name in both content and conduct.

To arrive at such a policy will involve a collective effort to replace self-delusion with realism. All involved, in national capitals as well as Brussels, need to wake up to the realities of Europe's current position in the world and where it is headed. If they are truly interested in Europe's future security and prosperity, they should start to replace the comfortable slogans to which European external strategy has been reduced with clear-eyed assessments and hard-headed policies. Anyone who thinks there is a realistic alternative to more common action should make that case. Otherwise, all should accept responsibility for making more of a reality out of the EU's common foreign and security policies.

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