

European issues  
n°294  
13<sup>th</sup> November 2013

# European strategic interests: choice or necessity? [1]

Michel FOUCHER

## BUILDING A CENTRE OF POWER AND INFLUENCE – THE THIRD STAGE OF THE EUROPEAN PROJECT

The serious problems affecting Europe at present are not the result of a simple economic and financial crisis; they come from geo-economic change and a major world geopolitical transition. The present collective management of present weaknesses (sovereign and private debt, public deficits and low growth) will lead to results but it is reducing European action and discourse down to the economic dimension alone. It is a strategy of necessity.

The time has come to move onto the third stage in the European project: establishing a centre of power and influence in a polycentric world, which will be extremely interdependent not cooperative enough and which will face vital challenges. It will be a strategy of choice.

This large scale change supposes that adaptation by the States of Europe to the risks and opportunities of economic globalisation will not lead to excessive divergence in their response to this, since this would weaken the internal cohesion of the European Union. It is up to the European institutions to ensure this.

The completion of this project also implies the establishment of a short list of interests that are objectively common and explicitly shared and which are not just limited to the domain of the economy and trade. This action is a precondition to the definition of a common external policy, which is other than an amicable "soft power". However the rare texts which refer to the inclusion of the European project in the world highlight the constant hesitation between the European Union's definition of itself as a community of values and the assertion of its interests.

One of the cultural differences between the Americans and the Europeans lies in the former's ability to demonstrate explicitly their collective preferences and interests long terms – which are extensive and will remain so[2]. The defence directive of 5th January 2012 bears witness to this in its very title: "Maintaining US global leadership". The speech by the re-elected President, delivered in Chicago in the night of 6th to 7th November 2012 was another illustration of this[3].

This is indeed a strategy of choice and anticipation.

In contrast with the two previous stages in European integration, nothing like this has yet occurred in Europe: the still on-going reconciliation of nations, followed by the successful extension of democratic *acquis* to the second third of the continent. In these two periods the Europeans shared and drove forward a motivating (geo)political project. This task is complete in the view of history and has enabled the extension of democratic values and the provision of the foundation economic growth in Central and Baltic Europe. Stability and security has been achieved at an unprecedented level including in support of our Russian neighbour. In contrast this double historic achievement which was European-centred undoubtedly explains the gap that has formed between the European elites and the way they have gauged the geostrategic changes ongoing in the world.

The final report on the future of Europe written by eleven foreign ministers[4] refers much more frequently to values than to interests. These are only mentioned twice in comparison with five references to the former. But the text stresses the dimension of the "global player" which has to rally its forces to build an integrated approach based on a series of themes (trade and economic affairs, development aid, enlargement and neighbourhood, migratory flows, climate negotiations and energy security). It also encourages the "quest" for a European defence policy. Crises and competition with other economies, other society models and other values are taken into account in this document, which calls on the Union to become a "real player" in the international arena, notably in terms of defence.

The conclusions of the European Council of December 2012 devote two pages and six paragraphs to the common security and defence policy, observing that the Union is already playing a regional (neighbourhood) and global role in the civil-military management of external crises: "in a changing world, the European Union is called to assume greater responsibilities in peacekeeping and international security in order to guarantee the security of its citizens and for the promotion of its interests." A mid-term assessment will be

1. This text has been published in "The Schuman Report on Europe, the State of the Union 2013", Springer Verlag Editor <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/bookshop/0200-schuman-report-on-europe-state-of-the-union-2013>

2. «The USA will in all likelihood remain « the first amongst the powerful » in 2030 thanks to their preeminence in many areas, a legacy of their role as leaders » (Global Trends, National Intelligence Council, Washington, 12/2012)

3. « You elected us to focus on your jobs, not ours. And in the coming weeks and months, I am looking forward to reaching out and working with leaders of both parties to meet the challenges we can only solve together. Reducing our deficit. Reforming our tax code. Fixing our immigration system. Freeing ourselves from foreign oil. This country has more wealth than any nation, but that's not what makes us rich. We have the most powerful military in history, but that's not what makes us strong. Our university, our culture are all the envy of the world, but that's not what keeps the world coming to our shores. What makes America exceptional are the bonds that hold together the most diverse nation on earth.»

4. Final Report of the Future of Europe Group of the Foreign Ministers of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal and Spain, 17th September 2012

5. *Towards a new European Security Strategy, Food for thought, Buro Bezpieczenstwa Narodowego (BBN), Warsaw, October 2012*

6. Described as "growing assertiveness"

7. *Une Europe sûre dans un monde meilleur. Stratégie européenne de sécurité, Brussels, 12th December 2003.*

8. *Rapport sur la mise en œuvre de la stratégie européenne de sécurité – Assurer la sécurité dans un monde en mutation. Brussels, 11/12/2008 (S407/08)*

9. *Adopted during the 12th Franco-German Council of Ministers, Paris, 4th February 2010*

10. « Histoire et l'avenir du partenariat franco-allemand en matière de sécurité » Stéphane Bemelmans, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence of the Federal Republic of Germany, Institut des hautes études de défense nationale (IHEDN) 12th December 2012

11. *France believes that it has the right to intervene in its former colonies except in North Africa (which shows that Libya cannot constitute a precedent), unlike Germany for whom the refusal of any type of intervention by the Bundeswehr in former colonies is a political axiom.*

12. *Stances adopted by Wolfgang Ischinger (President of the Security Conference of Munich and Member for the French White Paper Committee on national defence and security 2012-3), Andreas Schockenhoff (Vice President of the CDU/CSU group and chairman of the Franco-German Friendship Group at the Bundestag) and Roderich Kiesewetter (Chair of the disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation sub-committee at the Bundestag) Strategic Franco-German Forum, IFRI and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Berlin, 29th November 2012*

13. *L'Europe à trente et plus, joint document by the Centre for Analysis and Planning and the Planungstab, 1999; L'Europe face aux défis de la mondialisation, idem 2002*

established at the European Council in December 2013. The insistence on the development of its capabilities is in line with the demand made by the American allies addressed to the Europeans in its directive of 5th January 2012, inviting them to be "producers" of security rather more than "consumers" of it.

This approach rules out the rapid completion of a "white paper" on European defence which was planned for in the French white paper of 2008, whilst several European states like Poland are pleading for the revival of the European security strategy[5], arguing the USA's geostrategic re-orientation and the hardening of discourse on the part of the executive in Russia[6]. The prevailing analysis states that this kind of exercise is premature because of the pre-eminence of economic and financial issues and the extent of internal divergence.

A review of the 2003 strategy text recalls[7] nevertheless the pertinence of the analyses put forward a decade ago: the challenges of globalisation, terrorist threats, proliferation, continuing regional conflicts, failing States, organised crime and cyber-security and global warming. The text revealed a sense of anticipation as it added neighbourhood security challenges to distant threats: "*in the era of globalisation distant threats can be just as worrying as those immediately to hand such as North Korea, Southern Asia and proliferation*". The settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict was defined as a strategic priority for Europe and the quest for strategic partnerships with Japan, China, Canada and India were being planned. In terms of interests, continued commitment to the Mediterranean and the Arab world, the "good governance" of the countries lying on the Union's borders and the development of international institutions like the World Trade Organisation and the International Criminal Court were mentioned.

#### INTERESTS WHICH ARE RARELY MENTIONED AND NEVER DEFINED: SOME CONCRETE PROPOSALS

Apart from these three exceptions the idea of European interests has never been clearly defined. The fear of divergence between hierarchies and State priorities, a kind of prevailing inhibition with regard to the USA which impose at best a strategic division of work, and finally the emphasis placed by political forces on a Union designed exclusively as a community of values thereby reducing its range of vision to its "soft power".

Some will regret that 2013 will pass without Mr Solana's document being reviewed beyond the mid-term assessment of 2008[8]. A first step would be to move forward in stages, establishing a short list of common or shared strategic interests. This would be a restricted but not an exclusive exercise and it would firstly be a part of the Franco-German partner-

ship.

The 2003 document can only be a starting point: completing it would not be enough. We also have to review the Franco-German document written in view of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Elysée Treaty, the commitments made in the Franco-German Agenda 2020[9] and the various white papers and strategic reviews available in both States.

The main guidelines of this document would be as follows: The starting point is the explanation or a reminder by each side of his own national interests as they stand, in a frank, lucid manner which then feed common interests. "*Every nation in a partnership has the right to its own interests; they have to be asserted peacefully*." [10] It is not a question of reducing them to the smallest denominator. Taking on board the "red lines" is realistic because they are legitimately different [11].

Once this premise has been accepted, because of changes in opinion in Germany, [12] which is drawing closer to the French analysis – talks must be held and the view of threats and strategic approaches have to be harmonised in order to develop a common strategic vision. This work should start with a common anticipation exercise in the face of the unpredictable led for example by analysis and prospective structures in both States. Precedents already exist. [13]

The common strategic and geographic priorities should include:

- the upkeep of European strategic autonomy in terms of security (access to raw materials, security of maritime and land trade routes) and stock flows (vital networks and infrastructures);
- the draft of a long term plan for positive interaction with all neighbouring geopolitical entities (enhanced and symmetrical cooperation with Maghreb, support to the transitions in the Mashriq, action that will promote European anchorage in Russia);
- commitment to joint action in crisis management in regions which are at a 3 to 6 hour flight from Paris, Brussels or Berlin;
- an integration strategy for middle-size emerging countries (China, Brazil and India apart) in the international system via strategic dialogue;
- a "third party" facilitating strategy in the half of the world extending to the east of Ormuz, in a part of Asia whose economic ascension is clearly visible and in which the EU has more than just trade interests; the Union cannot just content itself with an improbable duopoly between Washington and Beijing to co-manage future crises in regions which do not have any collective security structures and for whom neither the colonial period (Japan, China, Korea) nor the Second World War (Japan, Russia), nor the Cold War (Korean Penin-

sula) are over;

- the strengthening of multilateral organisations ensuring in particular the vigour of Romano- Germanic law;
- continued action in support of cooperation and development (11Bn€ in 2011). The Union is the first provider of development aid in the world: the aim is not primarily humanitarian but a contribution towards the long term stabilisation of neighbourhoods;

- the promotion and protection of trade interests. This falls within the domain of the community. Its scope is global. Given the asymmetry of the markets it is vital it emphasise the principle of reciprocity. The aim is also to protect and promote our industrial capabilities. As for the euro, its share in world reserves is rising (40% in the Central Bank of Russia, 26% in China, nearly 28% across the entire world), commensurate to the Euro-pean Union's economic and trade weight, the leading partner in each of the major States.

The choice of geographic priorities, of political and diplomatic vision will be based on the distinction of degrees of interest which determines the means and the tools to deploy. It is clear that in terms of defence and the projection of forces whereby Euro-pean States – which want to and can, act together as a regional player. But the European political model has a more global reach: based on the rule of law and the joint exercise of sovereignty in some areas, it will increasingly become a reference in the eyes of other regional entities in quest of organisation (like ASEAN, where thought is being given to collective security framework for 2015, the African Union whose support and external model are clearly Euro-pean and South America where the Union's experience is followed closely for domestic use).

The transition over to this third stage in the European project will suppose frank dialogue with the USA, outside of

the NATO framework (which the present Secretary General would like to make the exclusive area for debate over affairs outside of the zone) and beyond simple task sharing. During the Cold War the continent's security was the reserve of our grand ally and economic power and prosperity that of the Europeans. Since 1991 and even since 2012 it seems that serious issues (Asia) have been managed by Washington (the famous pivot) and that Europeans have the task of emerging from the economic crisis (which affects American interests) and policing the region. Is this division of strategic tasks desirable? Our future depends on a choice: if the Union sees itself as a sub- section of the West and accepts this division of tasks, its added value is not worth much. If it believes that it is one of the centres in a multi- polar world and that it is taking on global interests, then it will enjoy real added value.

In this perspective of recasting the European project, progress in terms of European defence is a vital, necessary condition and an asset. Common action in this extremely sovereign area will bear witness to the confidence achieved between nations. Jean- Yves Le Drian, the French Defence Minister, sees in this a new means to cement European integration: "I am convinced that it is European Defence that will be the final stone to be laid in peaceful Europe, because there cannot be any greater confidence between Member States than sharing, in the face of common challenges, the same ambition in terms of defence. This is our ambition." [14]

---

**Michel FOUCHER**

geographer and diplomat, member of the Robert Schuman Foundation Scientific Committee.

See all of our publications on our site:  
[www.robert-schuman.eu](http://www.robert-schuman.eu)

Publishing director : Pascale JOANNIN

---

**THE ROBERT SCHUMAN FOUNDATION**, created in 1991 and acknowledged by State decree in 1992, is the main French research centre on Europe. It develops research on the European Union and its policies and promotes the content of these in France, Europe and abroad. It encourages, enriches and stimulates European debate thanks to its research, publications and the organization of conferences. The Foundation is presided over by Mr. Jean-Dominique Giuliani.