European strategic interests: choice or necessity? [1]

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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 eco-economic and financial crisis; they come from geo-economic change and a major world geopolitical transition. The present collective management of present weaknesses (sovereignty 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 interde-pendent 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 explicitly shared and which are not just limited to the domain of a short list of interests that are objectively common and explicitly shared.

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 geopolitical 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/co/books/shop/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 our 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
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 exe-cutive 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, prolifera-tion, 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 develop- ment of the Mashriq, action that will promote European anchorage and strategic dialogue; - 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 geo pol itical entities (enhanced and symmetri- cal 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 ofOrmuz, in a part of Asia whose eco nomic 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-
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