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THE EU AND THE WORLD: NEW CHALLENGES AND TRENDS

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The current profile of EU external relations: is there in your view any possibility to improve their effectiveness?

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1. Introduction

The EU is a unique organization developed from scratch after the WW II. It is remarkable to what extent it managed to develop and how it has improved life of millions of its citizens. Certainly, there is a high potential within the EU to make of it a global player with international respect. Taking it as a one unit, the EU is the largest economy in the world. Features such as a single market, unique currency, diplomacy and also political institutions put the EU somewhere between a fully fledged state and an international organization. However in the latest years the prestige and soft power of EU are falling apart due to the economic crisis, but also because of an incapability to react on world as well as on domestic problems. Experts assume that the EU could be viewed as a world player but it has to overcome the impediments to a better coordination of its external actions. In our paper we would like to suggest some proposals to improve the image, efficiency and position of the EU in the world. At the beginning, we will specify the areas where the EU should act with one voice. Secondly, we will focus on its strategic partnerships. Finally, our paper will suggest concrete measures to be taken to make the EU more visible on the world scene.

2. Where to act as single player?

The constant problem of national interests blocks the decision making and effective actions in various spheres of external relations of the EU. Therefore, the concrete areas and fields where the reactions and policies would be adopted under the banner of the EU not the member states' have to be precisely stated. Even though, it might sound too difficult to accomplish, there certainly exist such areas. All the EU members enjoy the democracy and the rule of law. Consequently, the prior area of external relations of the EU should be democracy promotion, support for human rights and civil liberties. The second area of common interest and uniquely an EU domain, should be development aid and cooperation with the third world. Moreover, peace support activities and peace building would also be much more efficient and fruitful when directed only from one center. Regional cooperation with strategic partners is the main objective of EU foreign policy, but one can still see various member states to act on their own.

2.1. Democracy promotion

The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights report 2011-2013 acknowledges that the EU is based *on principles of liberty; democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law.*¹ Last researches have shown that since 2008, democracy in the world has been on the decline.² Thus, the actions aimed on support for democratic opposition to authoritarian regimes and help to various citizens' initiatives and engagement, have to be the core of each of the EU external actions. Such approach has already proven to be very successful in Central Europe, where post-communist countries were guided to fulfill the criteria for EU membership and simultaneously they were creating a more democratic, open and transparent society. If the EU is to be a world player it has to try promoting and spreading its core democratic values all over the world. As a result, a successful transition towards democracy with EU assistance would give the EU global appreciation.

2.2. Development aid and cooperation

The EU has joined the UN Development goals in 2000 with the highest priority to eight of them.³ Several projects conducted by the EU were successful and lead as an example for further activities.

We can mention productive job creation in Malawi, where through agriculture and forestry work communities were able to get access to market and social facilities.⁴

In order to gain more visible and internationally recognized results, programs and actions held by different member states should be unified and the national development aid agencies should fully cooperate in sharing their experiences and resources. Furthermore, EuropeAid could possibly embody all these ODA (official development aid) national agencies. Consequently, projects in developing countries might be coordinated by the body of inter - EU experts and volunteers. Furthermore, in terms of grant finance to developing countries, the EU ranks 5th in the world behind its two members – France and Germany. Thus, if the entire EU was unified in this field it would undoubtedly become the most important in the world.⁵

2.3. Peace promotion and peace building

The EU has already been involved in Balkans, Georgia after the 2008 war with Russia and in the DR Congo.⁶ The target of EU involvement in conflicting territories should be to prevent killings and to help to restore peace. Consequently, the EU must deploy more of its capacities to create military bodies which can be sent to risky regions as an immediate response which would prove that the EU is aware of what is going on. The problem arises when focusing on legitimacy of such an involvement. Will there be any mandate and from whom? We suggest that the EU should offer its help to different countries with which it had previously signed some agreements. When dealing with undemocratic and repressive regimes, the EU has to stand at the side of democratic opposition. Plus, every member should provide non- military staff, too. This includes medical staff, teachers and assistants. Special representatives to the respective territory or country that would serve as a direct interlocutor between the EU and the local ground should be appointed by the EU.

2.4. Cooperation with strategic partners

With emerging powers such as BRICS countries the EU is facing new challenges to strengthen its position and value of its voice on the world scene. Deeper cooperation with the closest neighbors and formation of positive relations with new powers should be fundamental for the EU.

What caught our attention was the 2011 initiative of V4 countries comprising Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to form a battle group without the backing by any European power. Some analysts argue that they started to feel a fear of Russia and the European debt crisis made their fate in EU to weaken.⁷ The V4 countries should certainly not reject further involvement by other member states because this can be wildly seen as a division of the EU to smaller units either military or not. Regarding EU – Russia relations, we consider them to be one of the top priorities of the EU external actions. Because of its energy dependency, trade and geopolitical importance EU has to act unanimously towards Russia. Forming local battle groups raises a question of common European military. Would it make the EU stronger, more influential and more secure for its members? At the beginning, this should serve primarily for defense purposes. Since NATO's commitment to Europe after the Libya operation, when several of NATO members refused to participate, started to be questioned. Even if the clause of mutual assistance among member states exists, the common army would be more efficient and cooperation in developing new techniques and strategies will certainly yield more results.

3. What measures to take?

Primarily, if EU wants to attract via soft power it has to improve the damaged image and start to clean up the mess on its own ground. The states like Italy, Greece and Spain should be able to cooperate with the rest of EU. The national interest is playing a high role in this problem and thus is

inhibiting EU to develop. The EU has to fundamentally change its approach towards national states, members of the EU, creating exclusive and monopolized competences where national states cannot interfere. Because two sovereign powers which cohabitate will interfere in certain points and on this own no one can say where competences of the EU ends and those of national states start.

Putting this problem on international ground, the EU has a very little of strength outside of the old continent. Its strength is based on soft power, which is power of attraction, and this is undermined first of all by the diplomatic relations, because the EU is not unified on this ground. As we mentioned the diplomatic relations with the third world countries should be on the highest level, and in problematic countries such as Afghanistan, Libya or Iraq where EU should do the attraction, should be an exclusively domain of the EU and not of national states, the embassies in these countries should've been monopolized by the EU, so the rest of the world would see that the EU is unified under one banner and national interests are not fighting against this. Of course this might be only during the highest priority times, or that other nation state should have diplomatic relations too but on the middle level, not the highest one like the EU should have. This will eliminate the disunity and start a new era of diplomacy where the EU will gain the image of a confederacy or one country, the state of Afghanistan will not deal with France, Italy or the UK, but with the EU itself. The unified diplomacy of the EU should be the first but main points in improving the relevancy and image of itself in the world and attract the attention to the EU in a positive way. Because in last problems like Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq, the member states of the EU had diametraly different opinions on what is going on, for example Britain as a regular ally of the U.S. dashed into Iraq to help, while others like Spain didn't approve the war at all. EU should be more unified in its opinion.

With this approach done, the EU should aim for its positive influence in problematic spheres, like mentioned Afghanistan, Iraq or Libya. The European Union should not be confined within its borders and work on democratic principles and partnerships throughout the world. The fails of the EU in Afghanistan are the proof of its insufficiency towards its goals; the union had a great opportunity to raise its international status and importance, but failed instead. The possible disinterests lead to low economic backing of the projects with low personnel and experts regarding the specific areas. For example the training of Afghan National Police force, where only a few experts were sent and the backing from side of the EU was culpably neglected. With this approach the EU will never get the status of an international player and valuable ally. Its image in Afghanistan went low and also the perception of the EU by other countries went down classifying it as a regional power for Europe or just an economical force.

As long as sanctions are perceived as the most important trump in the hands of the EU, they have to be aimed on the goods that are crucial for the conflict or for the regime. It should be easier to agree on sanctioning another state than to reach the full agreement on military involvement. It is fundamental to stand for the same position in all parts of the sanctions. There exist several types of restrictive measures: arm embargos, trade and financial sanctions, flight bans, restriction of admission, diplomatic sanctions, boycott of sport or cultural event and suspension of cooperation with third countries.⁸ Yet, we can witness another misunderstanding among EU members towards the 2012 UEFA European Football Championship in the Ukraine. While Mrs. Merkel invites to boycott it by all member states representatives, the Slovak president has already approved his participation. Even if we can consider the situation in Ukraine not as critical as in Syria, the same position and attitude is required for the positive image and respect from other countries. We think it is better to consult at one table and then make a statement. TV communication among leaders is neither useful nor will it give the EU more influence on the international scene. Taking the Syrian example where sanctions targeted *"the energy, financial, banking and trade sectors and include the listing of additional individuals and entities that are involved in the violence or directly supporting the regime"*⁹ we can see the commitment of the EU. However, it still seems not enough to end Syrian killings. What is the next step? On one hand, we might suggest abolishing all the trade with

Syria what will certainly weaken the economy of the country. On the other hand, such a measure will also hurt the population and it can cause even more suffering. But, Syria or another sanctioned country, can find other suppliers and trade partners. Therefore, the EU should search for countries, which are economically bound to the one in question and via negotiations reach an agreement on sanctions or different non-military measures. Nowadays, it is here where the EU strength is located. And the EU should do its best to reach its goals by using sanctions. For the moment, there is no other more efficient way.

The EU should step up with its potential and start to work more on its foreign relations. We suggest working groups of experts invited from problematic regions where the EU wants to operate. These groups should be made of people who are living in the defined, specific region. These working groups should have a high counseling priority within the EU. Since there is a lack of experts for certain regions in the world, also an US lack of experts, this kind of invitation should work for the EU, because with this the Union will gain a much better picture of what is going on and how to interfere and help. These groups will activate only during times when the EU starts to operate actively like a working group for Afghanistan, a working group for Libya etc. With this groups which would contain experts in fields of politics, ethnical, cultural and historical background of the specific country, the EU will have complex information on how to help or work on defined problem and work it out effectively.

The Union must however unify and eliminate the national interests of its member states and advance as one unit. This means that the EU should also integrate one united foreign policy because if the EU does one thing and other members will do otherwise it will have some effect, but in the end the EU will never have the international acknowledgement. The elimination of member states' national interests is crucial for the EU. By becoming more cooperative one unit either federation or confederation the EU can gain influence on the world scene. Otherwise, it will remain only of regional and economic relevance. It is necessary to change the competences of institutions. First of all European Union is an organization which is very notably recalling a state, it has parliament, government – commission, court and its president. However when we look at the competences of each of these organs we can't say they have a lot of power, actually their only field of activity regards the economic ones.

If the EU has a president it should not only be a face, but it should have real competences, like deciding as one person during critical times what to do, of course again with working groups of experts as a counseling institution, but the decisions must be quick as the urgent situation asks to be. The position of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) should embody relevant competences, too. HR should obtain a status of a real minister of foreign affairs. This way it could coordinate the actions of its staff and can negotiate. The personal choice should be considered more carefully. We have all been the witness of the worldwide criticism of the EU for the choice of its HR.

Another possible reform lies in the area of decision-making. Nowadays, every taken step requires unanimity. The whole apparatus makes it very complicated to settle one defined problem and decisions take too much time. This is the core problem, because it is here where national interests weigh heavily. It is impossible to eliminate them totally. But, some states should make a compromise. What is good for them is not necessarily good for the EU as a whole. Therefore, we suggest the qualified majority decision-making at least in some types of decisions on foreign policy. For instance, to impose sanctions, verbal statements, develop new partnerships and cooperation programs and to express the opinion on the level of other international organizations.

As for the military involvement, there are several limits. Since the EU doesn't possess its own forces, it actually cannot do anything on its own like NATO for instance. As we have already

mentioned, soldiers of the EU should fundamentally serve as peace keepers or peace builders. A common army should serve only for defense purposes. Hypothetically, there could be a branch of soldiers and other military staff that would be sent to fight in conflicts under the EU banner. However, this requires the coordination of its role with NATO or the UN. Taking the Libyan example - is it possible that alongside NATO forces there would be also EU forces fighting in the conflict? And is it necessary when the majority of EU members are NATO members? Germany was reluctant to intervene in Libya even while being a NATO member. If we created this type of body within the EU, absolute consensus over its deployment would have to be guaranteed and the participation of all member states would have to be without doubts. Otherwise it would be useless.

Among other steps towards a more efficient foreign policy, we suggest the creation of an independent platform for a council on foreign relations. We want to see the American Council on Foreign Relation as an example. Even if the European Council on Foreign relations already exists, it is not so widely known and used. This council should have a status of think – thank composed of experts, scholars or even politicians from all over the EU who would give their opinion on issues shaping today's international agenda and highly influencing the EU. By sharing various points of views and analysis of topics, decisions and final attitudes would be of higher quality. Moreover, citizens will have an access to more information and they could also react on the issue. So, decision makers would have to be more accountable for their decisions.

However, if the EU wants to become an effective power, it has to become supranational, the teams and MP's should be European not French, German etc. The EU should cancel some of the institutions like the European Council and reduce it to a solely counsel organ, because the core of its problem is that national interest are being promoted in these institutions. The EU has to be freed of national interest and change the institutions accordingly, it does not matter if smaller states or bigger states are in disadvantage on a few occasions, and the most important part is that the EU will become one powerful organization. There is no matter whether small or strong member states have different preferences because all problems within Europe are including the EU as well, so it is in their best interest to solve them. If the Union starts also now the policy of trying to satisfy everyone, the result will be that it will move nowhere, and will acquire nothing or will petrify into a very inflexible organization. The EU must be quick and strong in its political and economical institutions where real problems will be solved putting aside the national interests of its member states. The EU is now an economic power; maybe it's time to make it also a political one and to use national states as a stepping stone towards unification. If EU will stay confined between national states and pure economic motives, it will remain a regional power and will accomplish nothing, in that case the ECSC format of EU will suffice for the EU.

4. Conclusion

Our paper tried to develop various approaches and suggestions on how to improve the effectiveness of EU external relations. One of the main goals of the Lisbon treaty was to make of the EU a global player. Yet, we can see many backwards and problems to accomplish this goal. What weakens the actions of the EU the most, are the national interests of its members. But, we have analyzed the areas where the EU should act as one, without important impediments. This includes democracy and human rights promotion, which are the core principles of the EU, development aid and peace keeping and peace building. As long as the EU does not have its own military forces under one command, different types of restrictive regimes seem to be the most efficient way of how the EU can shape the situation on the world scene. Competences of its representatives and decision-making on external actions should be also reformed. All in all, if the EU wants to be perceived as an important player it has to act like one, with one voice and opinion expressed together. Otherwise, the EU will remain influential only within its own territory.

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