

The EU as a Global Actor: United We Stand, Divided We Fall*

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Introduction

The year 2016 has been termed the '*annus horribilis*' (Leonard, 2017) for the European Union (EU) from a number of perspectives: the United Kingdom decided to leave the club in June 2016, refugee inflows have continued and the migration issue divided member states, terrorist attacks hit Brussels, Nice and Berlin, while domestic politics have been marred by the rise of radical nationalist parties and threats to democracy, human rights and rule of law within and outside the Union.

Although all of these issues have repercussions for Europe as a global actor, 2016 did not embody a low point in the EU's foreign policy. In contrast to previous years when internal bickering and divergences slowed much of the progress, 2016 has in fact shown that when there is a common will among member states and across EU institutions, the EU can act relatively fast even when faced with a challenging environment. As much as in other policy areas, 2016 has proven that European unity is a key to successful crafting and swift execution of a joint action in EU foreign policy. The presentation and subsequent implementation of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS) in the areas of defence and security through the EU's 'Winter Package' is a case in point. In fact, it could be argued that within a span of several months, the EU has achieved in defence and security what has been sitting on its plate for a number of years thanks to its unified approach.

On the other hand, 2016 has also exposed three negative trends that have impacted and may continue to influence the EU's external action in the future. First, discord among, but also within, EU member states can lead to contestation of policies that have been considered a cornerstone of European integration. The drama around the EU–Canada free trade agreement and emerging doubts over the EU's ability to conclude any bilateral trade deal have cast a shadow over the EU's most long-standing external pillar, the Common Commercial Policy (Article 207 TFEU). Similarly, albeit at the international level, the inability to co-ordinate both among member states and within a member state led to an unexpected outcome during the selection of the next UN Secretary General.

Second, the EU can no longer take old alliances and friends for granted, which pertains not only to the UK and Brexit, but also to the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. Trump questioned the merits of the EU throughout his electoral campaign in 2016 and it is unclear to what extent he will follow through on his campaigning rhetoric with action while in office. At the same time, 2016 also highlighted the fact that the EU cannot go it alone. EU diplomacy depends on its partners, whether

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they are other organizations, such as NATO, multilateral settings, such as the UN and its climate change panel, or other partner countries who might be of a friendly or less friendly nature.

Third, as in the previous year, 2016 revealed that the boundaries between the external and internal policies of the Union are becoming increasingly blurred. A crisis which is primarily about internal policies such as migration, cannot be tackled with the EU's internal tools only but requires the EU and its member states to employ its external relations toolkit, targeting third countries which are the sources and transit countries for the highest numbers of refugees and migrants. Not only due to the urgent nature of the problem but also thanks to achieving a united position on how to combat the sources of migration, as with the EUGS, the EU acted quickly and came up with a series of 'migration compacts' with five African countries. Last, 2016 has also demonstrated that a lot of work has been done under the radar in areas which do not grab the media headlines but are no less important, from the donor conference on Afghanistan, to the EU–Asia summit and to Ecuador joining the EU FTA with Peru and Colombia.

The following contribution will explain how these and other issues played out in the EU's decision-making in the fields of foreign, defence and security policy in 2016. It will branch out into tangential areas such as international trade and justice and home affairs.¹ The contribution will focus on the EU's role as a global actor at four levels: inter-institutional, bilateral, regional/inter-regional and multilateral. Borrowing from, and expanding on, the categories used in the previous *Annual Review* (Pomorska and Vanhoonacker, 2016), the contribution will consider how well the EU has done in 2016 as a diplomatic actor, as a strategic actor, as a defence and security actor, as a regional and inter-regional actor, as a trade actor and, finally, how it all fits within the image of the EU as a global actor. If there is any lesson to be drawn from 2016 for the EU and its role on the international stage, it is a simple one: as a global actor, united the EU stands, divided it falls.

I. The EU as a Diplomatic Actor in Brussels

By the end of 2016, after more than two years since assuming office, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission (HRVP) Federica Mogherini was firmly in the driving seat of the EU's foreign policy and its diplomatic body, the European External Action Service (EEAS). Despite occasional criticism, particularly on her reported 'soft stance' on Russia,² Mogherini has been enjoying more praise than condemnation in making the EU's foreign policy more effective and visible (von Ondarza and Scheler, 2017), particularly in contrast to her predecessor, Catherine Ashton. In fact, Mogherini was the only member of the College who was mentioned by Commission President Juncker for doing a 'fantastic job' during his State of the Union Address in September 2016 (Juncker, 2016, p. 63).

Throughout 2016, Mogherini did not experience any major turf battles with either EU member states or with the European Commission and has continued to have good relations with the European Parliament (EP), including the foreign affairs (AFET) and

¹ See Monar's contribution to this volume

² *EU Observer*, 9 March 2016; *Politico*, 22 March 2017.

budgetary control (CONT) committees. 2016 did not mark any extensive revision of the structural set-up in the EEAS either. Mogherini spent a large part of the year filling the positions in the top of the EEAS hierarchy that she to some extent reshuffled in 2015 (Novotná, 2016). The surprising departure of Alain Le Roy, the French EEAS Secretary General, for ‘personal reasons’,³ and his swift replacement by Helga Schmid, the former EEAS Political Director/Deputy Secretary General, as of 1 September, was the most significant personnel change in the EEAS Brussels headquarters. It followed the no less unexpected departure of Stefano Manservigi, the chief of Mogherini’s cabinet, to the post of Director-General in the Commission’s DG International Cooperation and Development (DEVCO) in mid-May 2016. Since Manservigi served as the link and a symbol of improved relations between the EEAS and the Commission, and Le Roy decided to quit the EEAS after only about a year and half, speculation abounded about the true reasons behind these resignations, namely disagreements over EU foreign policy with their boss, Federica Mogherini, and dissatisfaction with being relegated to executives of the Service rather than influential policy-makers.⁴

HRVP Mogherini quickly nominated an Italian collaborator and former socialist MEP, Fabrizia Panzetti, to become her new chief of staff, thereby buttressing the links to Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and the Socialist party, whilst the French were assigned Schmid’s former job for their diplomat, Jean-Christophe Belliard. As a result, Mogherini strengthened her leadership position within the service and, intentionally or not, surrounded herself with women, thus reinforcing the number of female staff in the EEAS management. However, this welcome trend was not replicated by nominations of female EU ambassadors; in fact, this percentage decreased to slightly below 20 per cent, hence reversing the incremental progress under Ashton (Novotná, 2015). On the other hand, Mogherini stopped the tendency to overload the heads of EU delegations with appointees from national diplomatic services (Novotná, 2014) and the proportion of EU ambassadors from EU member states vs. those from EU institutions hovered around 56 per cent vs. 44 per cent.

Helga Schmid, who came from the Council and has been with the EEAS since its early days, was put in charge of two special task forces to deal with career issues. As the EEAS trade unions claim,⁵ coherent career planning is still an issue, particularly for those who were transferred from the now defunct DG RELEX and the Council back in 2010. A lack of career prospects and unclear job development does not help create trust of the EEAS staff in their institution and management (Henökl, 2016) and hinders construction of *l’esprit de corps* (Juncos and Pomorska, 2014). It remains to be seen whether the latest human resources efforts will have any positive effect. All in all, however, after six years, the EEAS is no longer a ‘toddler’ who has been learning how to talk and walk,⁶ but is maturing into a pupil who can not only read other’s instructions but also write his own papers.

³ *Politico*, 6 June 2016.

⁴ *Zaman France*, 16 June 2016 *Politico*, 6 June 2016.

⁵ *NEAR You EEAS News Bulletin*, 22 March 2017. Available online at: <http://eurotradeunion.eu/dochtm/bulletin19en.htm>. Last accessed: 17 April 2017.

⁶ Interview with EU Ambassador João Vale de Almeida, 16 February 2015, Brussels.

II. The EU as a Strategic Actor

Following the European Council Conclusions (2015), the first half of 2016 was dedicated to drafting 'A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy' (EUGS), while the second half of 2016 was spent on implementing it in the areas of defence and security.

The last time that the EU published a strategic document was in 2003 when High Representative Javier Solana, at that time still 'single hatted' before the Lisbon Treaty, drafted his European Security Strategy, or ESS (Council of the European Union, 2003).⁷ Since then, not only has the institutional framework changed as well as the role of HRVP, but also the international context within which the two strategic texts were conceived. ESS reacted to the events of 9/11 and, mainly, George W. Bush's doctrine of the 'pre-emptive' war in Iraq, while EUGS is, in its own words, a response to a 'more connected, contested and complex world' (European Union, 2016, pp. 7–8) of the second decade of the 21st century.

Nothing illustrates better the difference between the two eras than the introductory lines of the two documents. While ESS starts off by saying that 'Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free' (Council of the European Union, 2003, p. 1), EUGS paints a much bleaker picture by positing that 'the purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned' (European Union, 2016, p. 3). Leaving semantics aside, however, EUGS indeed came as an answer to various calls for an EU 'grand strategy' (see, for example, Howorth, 2010) and after a long period of disinterest in a long-term thinking among top EU foreign policy-makers. In fact, as Nathalie Tocci (2016b, p. 2), a special advisor for drafting EUGS, notes, Ashton believed that a strategy was not worth the paper it was written on.

As already indicated in the previous *Annual Review* (Pomorska and Vanhoonacker, 2016), Mogherini took quite a different approach. During the two-phase period of 'strategic reflection', the first culminating with an assessment document release in June 2015 and the second finishing with the EUGS a year later, Mogherini and her team developed a specific working method where Tocci together with the strategic planning division within EEAS led the official work with EU member states and the Commission (mainly through a special task force established by the Secretariat but involving most of the DGs), while the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) co-ordinated public outreach and consultation, leading to a 'whole of the EU' approach and using both Mogherini's HR and VP hats. In fact, a number of times Mogherini emphasized that 'the process was as important as the end-product' (see, for example, Mogherini, 2015).

At the communication level, the 'strategic semester' snowballed from initially six to eight public conferences to over 50 events (Tocci, 2016b, p. 5) from October 2015 to April 2016 across all EU member states, while EUISS regularly published expert opinions from inside and outside the Union on its website and eventually in an edited volume (EUISS, 2016). The EP added its own report which was debated with Mogherini, and several national MPs and parliaments joined or organized their own events (EUISS, 2016). Although the range of the public outreach was impressive and Tocci was 'personally surprised by the degree of interest this process solicited' (Tocci, 2016b, pp. 5–6), this surprising reaction testifies to two broader issues: first, that some Europeans are eager to

⁷ ESS was updated in 2008.

be involved in discussions on EU-related matters once they have a chance to do so and, second, that they would like to see the EU play a significant role in foreign policy as various opinion polls also often confirm. On the other hand, before the 'EUGS method' could be used for any other far-reaching EU-wide reform, such as on treaty change, it would need to be modified so that it reaches out to the ordinary citizens rather than to already interested expert audiences.

From the start, Mogherini was also convinced that for any strategy to be really joint, it would need a firm buy-in of all the actors, particularly all 28 EU member states (Mogherini, 2015). Special points of contact were therefore appointed within foreign affairs ministries that discussed (together with the Commission's task force) each chapter over the course of nine months with a 'broad outline' ready by December 2015 and a questionnaire sent out shortly afterwards. As Tocci explains, although the 'skeleton' of the text came from within EEAS and HRVP's team, the flesh on the bones was a product of national, institutional and public input which was nonetheless at times 'baffling' as when, instead of replies to her questions, officials came back with changes to the formulation of questions themselves (Tocci, 2016b, p. 6).

From early 2016, the EUGS debate started linking other levels, from political directors through Political and Security Committee (PSC) and COREPER up to various formations of the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC). Yet to prevent leaks and to avoid negotiating 'each comma', the full text was not circulated until three days before its official release to member states. Instead, 'confessionals' were organized with groups of member states who could read and comment on parts of the draft but were not allowed to take home either electronic or paper copies (Tocci, 2016b, p. 9) with the most thorny issues focusing on Russia, defence and migration.

EUGS was due for publication on the day after the Brexit referendum. On another date, EUGS would have probably enjoyed more attention both from leaders and the public, yet delaying it would have risked that EUGS could have been shelved (Tocci, 2016a). On 28 June 2016, the European Council (2016) 'welcomed the presentation of' the EUGS in its conclusions which is a far cry, and much less legally binding, from the enthusiastic support of Solana's ESS in 2003 when 'the European Council adopted the European security strategy and warmly congratulated SG/HR Javier Solana for the work accomplished' (European Council, 2003). Nevertheless, given the fact that finding a common language today among 28 rather than 15 members as in 2003 is much tougher and because of the Brexit turmoil, the summit's judgement on EUGS can be considered a measured success. Ultimately, its release so soon after the 23 June referendum 'served as a calculated diplomatic response to Brexit' that helped prevent 'end of Europe rhetoric that might have developed, as has so often been the case' (Davis Cross, 2016, p. 4).

The 50-page document which is divided into three parts, defines the Union's shared principles, priorities and suggests how to get from vision to action. Among its priorities, EUGS lists security of the Union (at home and abroad), state and societal resilience to the East and South of the EU's borders, integrated approach to conflicts, revamping of the EU's current partnerships and co-operative regional and global governance (through the UN and regional partnerships). Throughout, EUGS emphasizes that common interests can only be achieved through common action and means, mobilizing the EU's unparalleled networks, economic weight and tools at its disposal and investing collectively in a credible, responsive and 'joined-up' Union. Even though not as straightforward as the US National

Security Strategy, EUGS provides a single notebook with goals and aims for the EU foreign policy where all the actors can find their individual voices coming in and out throughout different movements but in the end creating the same music which is comprehensible to third parties.

Although there were some critical voices objecting to various parts of the EUGS as 'biased', particularly on Russia (Danilov, 2017) or as inadequate *vis-à-vis* the EU's neighbourhood (Smith, 2016) and emerging powers (Howorth, 2016), the EUGS received an overall positive feedback from scholars and think tanks alike (Biscop, 2016; Helly, 2016; Techau, 2016). Some appreciated that the EUGS provides 'a meta-narrative' and a combination of 'realistic assessment with idealistic aspiration' (Davis Cross, 2016), while others saw it as a 'pledge of unity' in the face of Brexit (Mälksoo, 2016). There has also been a strong focus on (not so) new terminology that the EUGS brings to the table: 'resilience' (Juncos, 2016; Wagner and Anholt, 2016), principled pragmatism, strategic autonomy, to name a few. Even though some of the terms are easier to gauge, such as 'surrounding regions', while a difference between 'comprehensive' and 'integrated approach' (Tardy, 2017) to crises is harder to decipher, they provide a common vocabulary that was subsequently used throughout the EU's strategies, public statements and Council conclusions. Most importantly, however, the EUGS 'has created some momentum on EU security and defence' (Dijkstra, 2016) which will be discussed in the following section.

III. The EU as a Defence and Security Actor

HRVP Mogherini's emphasis on consensus-building and ownership among EU member states and the Commission paid off. On 14 November 2016, fewer than five months after presenting the EUGS, the European Foreign and Defence ministers 'welcomed' her 'Implementation Plan on Security and Defence' (Council of the European Union, 2016). This decision was echoed by national leaders who endorsed the Plan during the December 2016 summit and, in addition, welcomed the Commission's proposal on the European Defence Action Plan from late November 2016. The European Council (2016) most eagerly supported the last piece of this triple 'Winter Package' when it urged 'swift action' in implementing the Warsaw Joint Declaration between the EU and NATO.

Although most of the deliverables, such as a new embryonic military HQ, or the Military and Planning and Conduct Capability facility, will see daylight in 2017, member state decisions in 2016 are significant for several reasons: first, and most importantly, security and defence came to the forefront of the EU's policy-making after years of stalemate. This is partly due to the sense of urgency and international crises, including hearing personally from the mayor of Aleppo about 'the brutality of the Syrian regime and its supporters', as expressed by Donald Tusk (2016) at the end of the summit. In fact, the HRVP's Implementation Plan as well as the Council Conclusions highlight a new 'level of ambition' for member states in three priority areas as identified by the EUGS: responding to external conflicts and crises, building the capacities of partners (such as resilience) and protecting the EU and its citizens.

Second, although Brexit overshadowed most of these developments, it paradoxically helped foster a sense of unity among the EU-27 and made the British government more willing to concede on Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) issues, such as

‘making the full use of Treaties’ through, for instance, the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO). Work on PESCO also foreshadows the reflection on how to move the European project forward after Brexit through various forms of multispeed governance. Third, defence and security implementation has been agreed upon in record time and often employs the language outlined in EUGS. All the Council Conclusions set various deadlines for the HRVP for further steps and include ‘rendez-vous clauses’ for member states to come back to the issues at stake, often throughout 2017, thus making sure that the topic does not slip from their attention.

Fourth, although CSDP and foreign policy has been the purview of EU member states, the Commission is getting increasingly involved, particularly through its financial instruments. As its Action Plan suggests, the Commission (2016) will create a European Defence Fund to support joint spending through a ‘research window’ to fund collaborative research in defence technologies and a ‘capabilities window’ allowing participating member states to purchase certain assets together. Moreover, it will promote investments by SMEs in the defence industry supply chains. The level of defence spending in Europe has been an issue for a long time, particularly for NATO, which was also underscored by Donald Trump throughout his 2016 presidential campaign. As Mogherini (2017) pointed out, however, although Europeans spend half as much as the Americans, the more worrying statistic is that with that money, European defence output is only 15 per cent of the American. The Commission’s part of the Winter Package, in particular, aims at tackling this national fragmentation and boosting economies of scale in European defence markets, although time will tell whether EU member states are willing to put these plans into action.

Fifth, as a follow up to the EU-NATO Warsaw Summit Declaration from July 2016, which was co-signed by Presidents Tusk, Juncker and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, member states approved in December 2016 about 40 ‘concrete actions’ implementing the agreement from co-operation on cyberthreats and strategic communications through to collaborations between Operation Sophia and NATO Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean and in the Balkans, up to moving in parallel the two institutions’ planning capabilities. Although a perfect unison has been held up by the Cyprus–Turkey issue that has not been resolved despite positive negotiations throughout 2016, Mogherini (2016) was right to say that it is the first time in EU-NATO history that there has been such a joint agenda. This enhanced EU-NATO collaboration is also in line with the EU-NATO Joint Communication on countering hybrid threats that was adopted in April 2016 and has been empowered by a mutual good rapport between Stoltenberg and Mogherini going back to their youth in their socialist parties.⁸

All in all, as an Ambassador to the PSC commented at a conference, the EU needs ‘a will, capabilities and money’⁹ to keep its credibility as a global actor. If the 2016 Winter Package is sustained, it will be a landmark development for a future EU unity in security and defence even if it does happen under the radar and in the shadow of possible disintegration.

⁸ *Politico*, 12 April 2017.

⁹ A remark by Czech PSC Ambassador David Konečný at an event organized by the EUROPEUM and CEPS, Brussels, 30 November 2016.

IV. The EU as a Regional and Bilateral Actor

The EU in the Neighbourhood

Although developments in the EU's neighbourhood, East and South, and on migration, are covered elsewhere in this *Annual Review*,¹⁰ given the fact that 2016 has proved again that the EU's internal and external governance are becoming increasingly intertwined, it is worth mentioning two aspects. First, on 18 March 2016, the EU reached the final agreement with Turkey on migration and fighting the human traffickers. Despite terrorist attacks in Ankara and Istanbul and tensions with President Erdoğan, particularly following the attempted *coup d'état* on 15 July 2016 and the subsequent crackdown on the president's real and imaginary adversaries, the Turkey deal has held up throughout 2016, alleviating the refugee flows to Europe. Similarly, EUNAVFOR Med Operation Sophia, re-named after a baby girl born aboard the ship, continued its operation to disrupt the migrant trafficking with an added mandate to train Libyan coastguards and support the UN arms embargo off the coast of Libya from June 2016. Although not an ideal situation, this was perhaps the maximum that the EU, and HRVP Mogherini, could have achieved due to the lack of progress on Libya's domestic political transition and negotiated settlement under the UN auspices.

Second, with similar aims in mind but focusing on the root causes of the migration crisis and transit countries, accompanied by the first disbursements from the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the Migration Partnership Framework was launched in June 2016 to work most intensively with five African countries, namely Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Senegal and Ethiopia (in October, two additional and extended compacts with Jordan and Lebanon were concluded as well as a non-legally binding Joint Way Forward migration commitment with Afghanistan), on the basis of tailor-made country approaches. In the spirit of the EUGS, these 'migration compacts' mix different policy elements, such as development aid, security, mobility, etc. and Mogherini, primarily with her 'Commission hat', oversees their implementation and co-ordination.

Although the migration compacts resulted from a relatively swift and unified action among member states on the external side of migration, it is more questionable whether they will yield a substantial decrease in the numbers of migrants coming from and through these countries. Moreover, although the EU has expanded its sanctions against the Assad regime, increased its humanitarian funding for Syria and is an active member of the International Syria Support Group, neither the EU as a whole nor its individual member states were able to stop the civil war and hence the refugee flows. The war in Syria has remained a protracted conflict between various domestic parties, ISIS/Da'esh and regional and global powers where the EU has had little say in its military solution even if it has been increasingly pro-active on a possible post-war reconstruction.

The EU Beyond the Surrounding Regions and Farther Afield

The EU's effort to work with partners, whether other regional groupings or single states, has been nowhere more pronounced than in its bilateral relations beyond the surrounding regions and farther afield. Although these activities signify the EU's role as a diplomatic

¹⁰ See Pomorska and Noutcheva's contribution to this volume.

actor on the global stage and are appreciated by these third parties, they tend to lack visibility back home in Europe.

In Asia, in July 2016, a successful 20th anniversary ASEM Summit took place in Ulaanbaatar which ended with a joint declaration among 30 European and 21 Asian countries (together with the ASEAN Secretariat and EEAS) and focused on connectivity and terrorism, while the EU–India summit in March 2016 re-energized the stagnating strategic partnership. On the other hand, due to the decision of the Hague Arbitration Tribunal on the South China Sea and a tense trade relationship between the EU and China, the EU–China Summit in July 2016 in Beijing was less productive and no joint statement between the EU and China was eventually agreed. Nevertheless, EU foreign ministers approved a new long-term strategy towards China, paving the way for an improved partnership. In line with the UNSC resolutions, the EU has also adopted a series of sanctions against North Korea as well as introduced its own restrictive measures in response to the DPRK's nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches, targeting the North Korean nuclear programme and also the government's popularity by prohibiting the sales of certain luxury goods. On North Korea, the EU has generally followed the US and South Korean hard-line policies pressurizing Kim Jong-Un's regime without coming up with any independent European strategy.

In the Americas, the EU continued its inter-regional relations with the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) through a ministerial meeting in October 2016, while it launched a new political dialogue and co-operation agreement with Cuba in December 2016. Taking the lead from Obama's thaw between the US and Cuba, the new dialogue symbolically replaced the EU position from 20 years ago, making it the most significant milestone in the bilateral relationship. Similarly, although out of the glare of publicity, the EU, as well as Mogherini personally and through a special envoy, supported the peace settlement between the FARC guerrillas and the government in Colombia first in September and, after a failed referendum, in November, through the EU Trust Fund for Colombia.

With North America, the transatlantic partnership flourished during the final months of the Obama Administration. President Obama (2016) delivered a highly praised address about the EU lauding it as 'one of the greatest political and economic achievements of modern times' in Hannover in April 2016, while Secretary of State Kerry gave a no less flattering speech in Brussels in October 2016. Moreover, in July 2016, Mogherini invited John Kerry to join the FAC meeting, the first time in the history of the Council that a US Secretary of State attended a session. Such warm sentiments have starkly contrasted with pronouncements by President-elect Trump, calling Brexit a 'great thing'¹¹ with predictions that other countries might follow the UK, his friendly relations with UK Independence Party's Nigel Farage, and a potential candidate for US ambassador to the EU who publicly advocated the EU's collapse.¹² Nevertheless, after a lengthy transition and several policy U-turns in early 2017, only time will tell whether the new US President will shift the country's stance on transatlantic relations as well.

¹¹ *The Guardian*, 16 January 2017.

¹² *Politico*, 2 February 2017.

V. The EU as a Trade Actor

The victory of the US presidential candidate who had been advocating ‘America First’ during his campaign has also provisionally ‘put in a freezer’¹³ the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Despite four heavy rounds of negotiations in 2016 and efforts to close the deal under Barack Obama (Morin *et al.*, 2015), the two sides made progress on less controversial areas, such as removing tariff barriers. But on the most sensitive issues such as geographical indications and public procurement, little or no progress was made. At the end of 2016, it was unclear whether TTIP might suffer the same fate as the other mega free-trade deal, the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), which the President-elect promised to shoot down on Day One in his office.

In parallel with transatlantic negotiations, the EU concluded the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) with Canada which includes innovative elements, such as the Investment Court System to resolve investor-to-state-dispute-settlements (ISDS), making CETA the ‘gold standard’ free trade agreement instead of TTIP. Following pressure from anti-globalization civic activists across Europe, and perhaps as a ‘trial case’ for TTIP, President Juncker decided to declare CETA a ‘mixed agreement’, where most of the parts of the FTA can be provisionally applied after its approval by the Council and the EP, while its full application, including ISDS, will be subject to ratification by 38 national and regional parliaments. However, the envisaged smooth path stumbled on a veto by Wallonia’s Prime Minister Paul Magnette whose region refused to give consent to the Belgian federal government to approve CETA in the Council. For several days, the region of about 3.5 million, run by a socialist party representing about 0.24 per cent of EU voters, held the remainder of the EU (and Canada) hostage to its domestic economic demands and political rivalries.

If a potential failure of TTIP can be attributed to externalities, such as an election of a protectionist American president, a CETA fiasco would have been unequivocally ascribed to the incapacity of EU member states to agree on a unified EU policy. It would put the credibility of the EU as a trade actor in danger, jeopardizing the long-standing EU competence in international trade and, to some extent, reversing 60 years of European integration by making a common commercial policy no longer common and based on Qualified Majority Voting but dependent on every veto point along the way. Wallonia was eventually persuaded to change its mind through various more or less substantial concessions and CETA was signed during the EU–Canada summit in Brussels in October 2016. Yet since CETA’s full application with ISDS is still subject to approval by 38 national and regional parliaments (and consent in the EP), a ratification process without any glitches is far from certain, putting into question the future of the EU as a trade actor.

Nonetheless, the EU has also celebrated five years since a successful entry into force of the EU–South Korea FTA and had various other less controversial free-trade deals in the making, including negotiations with Japan, the next large agreement ‘in the oven’ (Malmström, 2017). Even though these talks stalled in 2016 due to the Japanese objections to market access in agriculture and public procurement, the ditching of TPP might give them a new boost, making the EU market a more viable option for the Japanese producers if the US becomes protectionist. Moreover, in November 2016,

¹³ *EurActiv*, 11 November 2016.

Ecuador signed a protocol joining an FTA with Peru and Colombia, while discussions on modernizing a global agreement with Mexico continued as well as negotiations with MERCOSUR, the Philippines and Indonesia. Even though the EU might not reach an agreement with the US on setting the global trading standards (Hamilton, 2014), it does remain an attractive partner for those countries wanting to access its single market.

VI. The EU as a Multilateral Actor

On the multilateral level, the EU enjoyed successes, last-minute achievements and blunders, depending on how well it projected its unity to the outside world. On the positive side, having reached on 16 January 2016 'Implementation Day' of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear programme, the EU lifted all nuclear-related economic sanctions against Iran and a large delegation of seven Commissioners led by HRVP Mogherini visited Tehran in April 2016, kicking off closer co-operation in trade, science, energy, human rights etc. Even if the Iran deal does not survive Trump's presidency, it has been a historic moment for European diplomacy and proof of the mediating skills of both Ashton and Mogherini and their negotiating teams.

Similarly, the EU successfully co-hosted with the Afghan government a donor conference for Afghanistan in Brussels in October 2016 which endorsed its state-building reform and resulted in an impressive €13.6 billion in international commitments, including about €5 billion from the EU and its member states, while the EU simultaneously decided to close down its EUPOL Afghanistan civilian policing mission after nine years of existence by the end of 2016.

After a signing ceremony of the Paris climate agreement in New York in April 2016, member states dragged their feet and (some questioned) the deal's ratification. However, the threshold for its entry into force was eventually triggered after the ENVI Council approved the package on 30 September at the EU level and the EP gave its consent on 5 October, thus enabling its entry into force on 4 November 2016, just days before COP22 started in Morocco on 7 November. Although this was an eleventh-hour achievement, it was the EU's multilateral success nonetheless, having pushed for the first-ever universal, legally-binding global climate change deal for years, thus making the EU a leading climate power on the global stage.

However, European leadership and unity at the UN level was much less evident during the selection of a successor to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. According to unwritten rules, the new Secretary was expected to be a female from the Eastern European Group since neither a woman nor an Eastern European has ever held that post, yet the EU did not even attempt to put forward a single candidate but allowed competing contenders from across EU member states to enter the race. For outside observers the frontrunner would have been at that time Commission Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva, but Bulgarian Prime Minister Boris Borisov nevertheless chose to nominate UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova, another Bulgarian and a party ally. Even though Bulgaria changed its official nominee at the last minute and allowed Georgieva to jump in, it was too late, particularly since Bokova decided to stay in the race without her governmental support. As a result, the UN ended up with a Western European man instead of an Eastern European woman at its helm. Although some in the EU might be happy with the choice of a former Portuguese Prime Minister and UN High

Commissioner for Refugees, the appointment of Antonio Guterres clearly illustrated how internal fragmentation within and among member states can damage the image of the EU as a unified multilateral actor in the global arena.

Conclusion

In the Chinese lunar calendar, 2016 was the year of the 'Fire Monkey' which is a sign signifying lots of upheavals when anything can happen and everything is in flux and when unconventional solutions can be found to old problems. For the EU, 2016 was just that: the Brexit referendum shook the EU to its core, external challenges such as refugee and migration crises and war in Syria continued while long-standing partners like the US and policies like common commercial policy were put into question. Yet at the same time, creative solutions such as EUGS and its 'Winter Package' in defence and security started to make a difference on old issues that had been stalled for decades.

This contribution has discussed the ways in which the EU conducted its foreign policy in 2016: first at home in Brussels through various bodies, primarily the HRVP and her diplomatic service, EEAS, and through strategic thinking and drafting. Second, the contribution looked at how the EU has been projecting its power as a defence and security actor, a regional and bilateral actor in the surrounding regions and beyond, a trade actor and multilateral actor. While boundaries between internal and external policies, particularly regarding migration but also increasingly trade, were highly contested which is an issue that is likely to continue to present a crucial test for the EU in 2017, when it sticks together, and collaborates with partners, 2016 showed the EU can pursue a robust action across policy areas and levels. Despite all the EU's trials and tribulations, the EU remains a global actor, particularly when improving its hard power, in addition to its soft power.

Moreover, with EUGS and its implementation package, 2016 also demonstrated that if the EU wants to play a significant role in the world, it needs to clearly state to third countries what its goals and ambitions are before actually carrying them out. Particularly given its array of tools which are prerogatives of various institutions and power-sharing arrangements, EUGS provides such guiding principles and a vocabulary for all EU foreign policy actors. At the end of 2016, positive signs were emerging that the document may not end up being only another meaningless review but might become a strategy with actionable proposals in various sectors, making the EU a more assertive global player.

In 2017, the EU will be under the auspices of another 'fiery' sign, that of the Rooster. According to the Chinese zodiac, the year of the Rooster will be a powerful one with no middle of the road where impressions count as much as hard work and commitment. Although threats of the EU's internal disintegration matter for its standing in the world, perhaps the greatest challenge that the EU may face in 2017 abroad will be its relationship with its old partner, the US. Finding the ways in which the transatlantic relationship can keep on growing will depend not only on possible U-turns in Donald Trump's post-election 'tweetoric', but also on the unity of all EU actors across institutions and member states *vis-à-vis* the new US administration. To ensure success, the EU might be well advised to follow the lunar predictions for 2017: stick to the practical and well-proven paths rather than risky ventures.

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