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Cohesion of external actions

The European Union has achieved a lot in its relations with the rest of the world over the past decades. The actions undertaken on the Union level in common trade policy, development policy, and more recently, common foreign and security policy have contributed to peace and welfare inside the Union and outside its borders. Common actions have also had the benefit of helping to deepen a common European identity. However, today we are asking, how could we do more?

When assessing the performance of the Union up to date, we should look at the cohesion and consistency of the different external actions. Then we must acknowledge that the level of integration is rather different in common trade policy, development policy and common foreign and security policy. Also the instruments available and results achieved vary. Common trade policy, one of the cornerstones of European economic integration, has to a large extent been a success, not least due to rigorous application of the Community method in its operation. Foreign and security policy is much more closely linked to issues of national sovereignty and here we must discuss how much cooperation or integration at Union level guarantees the optimal results.

The importance of cohesion between different aspects of external actions can be seen in the light of potential mismatches of the common trade policy with other external policies. For instance the aims and means of Community development policy do not always coincide with those of the trade policy - the Union supports sugar producers at home and abroad, the results of which include heavy distortion of the world market and hindering the development of certain developing countries. Instead in the sphere of development policy more attention should be paid to better coordination between the Commission and the Member States. Reduction and simplification of instruments could lead to more flexibility, more efficient use of resources and better understanding of the ends and means of the Union both in Europe and in the partner countries. In addition, the principle of conditionality should be more strictly applied.

The pillar structure itself can also be seen as an obstacle on the way to achieving an efficient foreign policy. One possible solution would be to abolish it by creating a single treaty for all EU actions and giving the Union a legal personality. This would give more visibility to EU foreign policy actions and would make it easier to follow for the citizens. It would also make the EU a clearer and more visible partner for third countries. Whenever it gives a clear value added, Europe should be represented by a single representative in international organisations. However, one should maintain a certain flexibility and giving the whole representation to the Union level would be neither necessary nor realistic.

Future of the common foreign and security policy

The common foreign and security policy of the Union has so far been an area where development has been lagging behind the rest of the external actions. This is fully understandable as this topic is closely related to the core of national sovereignty. At the same time we can still see that the results that have been achieved over the past decade constitute a significant step forward from the days of European Political Cooperation.

The statement that the security environment is changing, and that we are facing new challenges at the beginning of a new millennium has become a true cliché. On the one hand we hear claims that more than half a century after the last world war we are still very far from answering the basic question of how to build a stable security network in Europe, let alone preventing and solving the security problems of a more global scale. At the same time we have to admit that given the perennial constraints imposed by the lack of resources, Europe has fared fairly well as far as the security is concerned. NATO has been the cornerstone of hard security in the free world and the European Union has gradually moved in to take care of the new, more sophisticated kind of challenges. Today we must ask whether the current division of tasks is still good enough or whether Europe should take a much more serious approach in developing its own security and defence policy.

The latter approach may sound tempting as security is always at a premium, and more security cooperation should consequently mean more security. However, this cannot always be taken for granted. Significant upgrading of European-level security cooperation would require a tremendous increase in resources and building up an extensive institutional structure. This

would inevitably divert resources, financial or other, from the existing cooperation within the NATO. In addition, the risk of duplication would certainly increase.

Thus the question is whether we should build up capabilities which would enable us to seriously intervene in case of a conflict or should the Union rather leave that space to other organisations while focussing its efforts on long-term goals of conflict prevention? Clearly, the citizens expect more security rather than less and showing that we have more of it would constitute a formidable outcome for the Convention. However, I am afraid that we would rather sooner than later run into problems of lack of trust between the participating states (a feature so evident in the third pillar cooperation today), lack of finances, confusion concerning the division of responsibilities with other global actors etc. Thus I would suggest that Europe should continue contributing to security in areas where it is the strongest - in developing and liberalising trade with third countries thus increasing global welfare; spreading democratic values in the world and leading here by example; continuing fulfilling the Petersberg tasks where the necessary tools already exist.

In order to achieve this, a greater portion of the EU budget should be used for external actions, more binding and flexible measures for implementing the CFSP should be designed, including a possible increase in qualified majority voting, and a more cohesive approach to all external actions should be achieved.