

Suggestions of the Netherlands for the Commission 2024 – 2029

A stronger geopolitical EU in the world: a more coherent EU foreign policy

Against the backdrop of an increasingly hostile geopolitical and security environment, there is growing urgency for the EU to develop a more coherent foreign policy. Great efforts are needed to build a stronger and more capable EU in security and defense, as well as to leverage its economic weight and regulatory power more effectively in its external relations. This will allow for the EU to develop a more flexible, transactional approach for its relations with third countries based on more equal partnerships.

The EEAS, the Commission, the Council and the individual member states all have their part to play in the execution of a coherent external policy strategy and should join forces when and where possible. Important steps have been taken but more is needed. Coherence must be improved at two levels:

- **Coherence among EU member states and EEAS:** A stronger HRVP and EEAS as brokers and initiators of joint diplomatic efforts of both member states and EU institutions is required. Both should not act as the EU's 28th diplomatic actor, but focus on improving the overall effectiveness of diplomatic efforts of member states and EU institutions.
- **Coherence among EEAS and the Commission:** The HRVP and EEAS should take a greater role and improve their operational capacity to work with Commissioners and Directorate-Generals -which should also work together more coherently- to prevent fragmented EU engagement worldwide. The EEAS and the Commission should look for synergy between all EU initiatives and capitalize on the EU being a strong investor, trade partner and development contributor.

How to operationalize a more coherent EU external policy

1. Suggestions on a strategic level:

- **New EU Global Strategy (EUGS):** since the EUGS launch in 2016 the geopolitical environment and the international order have fundamentally changed. In order to cope with new realities and be able to execute a coherent EU external policy a new comprehensive joint strategy is needed.
- **Revitalizing the role of the FAC** by improving preparations and decision-making is needed to allow for a more effective approach to the geopolitical challenges the EU is facing.
- **Better connecting external and internal security:** close coordination between the HRVP/EEAS with relevant Commission DGs responsible for internal security and with Member States, is needed to enhance resilience and respond to hybrid, cyber and terrorist threats, foreign information manipulation and interference, and transnational organized crime.
- **Strategic Compass:** a focus on implementation and eventually revising the Strategic Compass in line with a new EU Global Strategy. This could provide a clear path for the development of (strategic) capabilities that enable the EU to take more responsibility for its own security and defense. A vision should be included on the desired interlinkages between EU instruments such as NDICI-programming, EPF assistance measures, CSDP missions and the way in which these fit in a broader EU external (security) policy framework.
- **New ambition on EU defence industrial policy as formulated in EDIS/EDIP:** ramping up defence production capacity, maximizing innovation and increasing cooperation with regard to capability development and joint procurement is a prerequisite to achieve a stronger and more capable EU on security and defence that is better equipped against unfair competition from third countries. The involvement of the defence industry and development of defence capabilities should be part of a strong mandate of the next Commission in relation with the HRVP and member states. Efforts should be coordinated with and complementary to NATO initiatives.
- The **EU Economic Security Strategy** sets out a bold agenda to foster the Union's economic security. This requires, among others, substantive and coordinated external action on a range of external policies: coalition building with both likeminded and new partners is essential.

Therefore, the development of a comprehensive economic security framework requires continued involvement of the Commission, HRVP and member states.

- **Linking up with the strength of the internal market:** the role of the HRVP and EEAS in EU internal policies, such as the regulatory power of the internal market and the financial power of the Euro, should be improved for the EU to leverage its internal strengths to protect its interests abroad. The EU can also develop programs to support third countries in transition sectors such as digitalization, sustainability, regulations, standard setting and regional economic co-operation, building on the strength of the EU internal market.
- More effective **EU engagement with third countries** is underpinned by an integrated approach to develop partnerships in which development cooperation instruments are combined with financial/trade policies and stronger -more unified- diplomatic efforts. This requires building on other foreign policy instruments at the EU's disposal. Strengthening cooperation on migration should – where relevant - continuously be part of these partnerships.
- **EU enlargement:** candidate countries moving closer to the Union, should go hand in hand with upholding the process' merit-based nature, the integrity of the single market and European core values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law. The EU must remain a strong actor, with well-functioning institutions and rule of law, that can take effective and legitimate decisions so as to match its ambitions. Enlargement can support the geopolitical strength of the EU, but should not weaken the EU and its capacity to act.

2. Suggestions on an institutional-operational level

- **Centralized intra-DG geopolitical platform:** all relevant DGs in the EEAS and Commission should meet regularly to discuss geopolitical challenges. Based on joint analysis, the platform would be tasked to formulate coherent policy suggestions to protect against and counter foreign powers' coercive strategies and brief the Foreign Affairs Council (in all its configurations) for political guidance.
- Strengthen horizontal and whole-of government discussions **regarding relations with third countries** within the Council to mirror the set-up in the Commission mentioned above by using an existing working party or establishing a new configuration, if needed.
- **Strengthened EU diplomatic solidarity:** as part of the geopolitical platform, a push is needed for stronger diplomatic efforts to improve solidarity among member states when confronted with unilateral coercion by third countries. Affected member states should be able to quickly invoke an EU diplomatic response that demonstrates solidarity and unity. This strengthens the EU's geopolitical resilience and deterrence building on various instruments.
- **EU point of contact for sanctions** reinforce the current capacities in EEAS and the Commission. For the geo-strategic use of the instrument it is key to have a central capacity for common analysis on the impact of sanctions and circumvention, a strengthened common approach of effective enforcement at home, diplomatic outreach and targeted restrictive measures.

3. Suggestions on an operational level

- **Empowered HRVP with the operational capacity to execute joint strategies and initiatives:** to be effective, the HRVP must be enabled to more actively introduce policies and initiatives and bring together efforts of member states and EU-institutions. It can ask member states to develop ideas or take initiatives building on their vast diplomatic and organizational capacities. The strength of the EEAS in bringing together policies and departments should be used effectively. This could also lead to more Council decisions. In addition, the EEAS could be more active in drafting non-papers, potentially leading to joint communications.
- **Common calendar for joint visits and Team Europe Initiatives:** the EEAS should take the lead in coordinating joint visits by EU27 foreign ministers to promote and strengthen unity in foreign policy conduct. Coherent, transparent and consistent messaging is of utmost importance in gaining credibility and trust. The EEAS and members states should work on the basis of a 'common EU outreach calendar' for joint visits. This calendar would also serve to identify major topics and deliverables to be addressed by the EU and member states. EU needs and interests should be communicated in a strategic manner, and in a dialogue on equal

footing, showing a solid understanding of the needs of our partners, while we work to promote the visibility of EU-efforts in our partner countries much more.

- **Become the best strategic communicator:** the EU's capacity for strategic communication should be increased to become the most professional worldwide. EU and member states' actions should be aligned and mutually reinforcing. Ideally this results in a clear division of labour. All member states should designate single points of contact for strategic outreach activities.
- **Global Gateway that works for the EU and for third countries:** the Global Gateway should be further developed to connect diplomatic efforts, private sector investments and development programmes to enhance engagement with third countries to our mutual benefit. The EU can be a strong partner in tackling global challenges, such as climate mitigation and adaptation, food security, migration, the digital transition, inclusive digital transformation, and water management. It should adopt new ways of working to achieve results and create opportunities for the EU and its partners.