

POLICY PAPER AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Expert workshop

‘The Role of the European Union in Current Global Conflicts’¹

I. Introduction: Is there/should there be a European Strategy on how to deal with global conflicts?

*With the **European Union Global Strategy (EUGS)** of 2016, the EU has presented its latest foreign policy approach, including security policy and its role in conflicts. The EUGS, has updated the EU’s perception of the world and adjusted it to more recent challenges. Despite this already existing theoretical framework strategy representing its values and ambitions, the Union is still criticised for acting in a conceptual void and not having an actual strategy on its role in a changing world. Moreover, after the election of **Donald Trump** and the **Brexit**, alongside the migration situation and the ongoing war in Syria, crises in Europe’s neighbourhood and new threats from cyber-attacks and terrorism, it might also be argued that the EUGS is already outdated. Only two years afterwards, the requirements of the EU’s foreign policy have changed massively. With the Trump administration in office and the American fatigue of foreign involvement, that eventually started even before Trump’s election, the EU is losing the guarantor of neighbourhood security, open markets, safe transport ways and the multilateral world order itself. With the days of comfortable American protection being numbered, the EU now stands alone in the world and must step up to **strategic autonomy**. Therefore, it must reconsider its alliances and reshape its perspective in the global system. Without the US’ traditional role in conflict resolution, the EU might also need a feasible strategy of when and how to act in global conflicts and for the necessary common military capabilities to execute operations on all levels. Another organisational culture might be needed to adapt to new challenges. Furthermore, internal differences must be reevaluated in the light of new threats and tasks. With the emergence of PESCO, the MPCC and the EI2, we have already witnessed multiple adjustments of the EU security architecture, but more is likely to follow. Finally, the question of a common strategy or **common strategic culture** remains unsolved and seems to be the essential requirement of a new approach towards global conflicts.*

Strategic autonomy in a changing world

‘The times are gone where we could just count on someone else to come and solve our problems for us’, as Angela Merkel correctly analysed the current situation of Europe in the world. After the new US administration’s withdrawals from the Paris Agreement and the Iran Deal as well as the recent trade wars, the US obviously is no reliable partner anymore. Donald Trump certainly is the main culprit for this situation, which, however, started to develop much earlier. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has turned its attention to other regions of the world such as the Pacific and the Middle East, Europe has been of decreasing US interest. The wars in Yugoslavia on the one side and the war in Iraq on the other side have shown, that US and EU security interests have diverged – the developments under the Trump administration add a new quality; they are not a new phenomenon. The USA has benefited

¹ The workshop (see [programme](#)) took place on 10 July 2018. The following hbs offices were represented: Beirut; European Union; Prague; Ramallah; Tel Aviv; Turkey; and Warsaw.

greatly from being the long-time guarantor of the multilateral world order, but Mr Trump seems to perceive the world order as a zero-sum-game exploiting the leading USA instead of a system of cooperation and mutual benefit. The US is no longer willing to play the world police; the EU is on its own. As a reversal of this process is not likely after Trump's presidency, many in the EU ask for **strategic autonomy**, which also was a main motive behind the EUGS of 2016.

To achieve strategic autonomy, the EU must complement its increasingly integrated and institutionalised security architecture with a common strategic approach, a common strategic culture. Yet, a lot of thinking in the matter remains to be done and many see the EU in a conceptual void regarding strategy. With territorial defence still being the task of NATO, the EU's envisaged operational framework ranges from hard power crisis management, over traditional peacekeeping, capacity building and support to humanitarian emergencies to fields of internal dimension such as homeland, border and cyber security. However, these options for engagement are still very vague, and a scope of action is still far from being a strategic base for crisis solution. The aim of fifty to sixty thousand deployable troops in operational readiness for quick military engagement still reaches back to the Helsinki Headline Goals from 1999, obviously being far outdated. A new assessment of when and how to act in a global crisis would be a first step towards a European strategic culture. Nevertheless, that of course is a critical juncture and opinions vary enormously between the Member States. With EU security policy still being organised intergovernmentally and decided on by unanimous vote, institutional evolution is traditionally very slow and costly.

Do we need a realpolitik approach?

If the EU stands on its own in a global system that is on its way towards anarchy, strategic autonomy indicates strengthening the own position and reshaping the Union's approach towards global involvement. Under these circumstances, many experts in Brussels argue for a realpolitik approach of minimal interventionism with a stronger power projection of the EU. **Minimal interventionism** does not imply denying every military involvement and giving *carte blanche* to those willing to exploit a lack of force, it means to be highly reluctant and selective about military engagement. In this sense, a strong power projection is essential to credibly show the capability for effective action if intervention is necessary as *ultima ratio*. With this rather realist approach four scenarios of necessary intervention that can range until the use of force can be classified. With a clear **scope of action** envisaged, the EU would have a well-defined role in the world. Firstly, classic territorial defence of Europe, alongside homeland, border and cyber security are the key competence securing the very existence of the Union. Strategic autonomy in that sense would imply to beef up the European pillar of NATO to gain credibility and independence as well as to act more united as Europeans within NATO. As an independent nuclear deterrence strategy is very unlikely, sustainable ties to the US are indispensable and NATO stays vital to the European security architecture. Accordingly, transatlantic relations stay essential for territorial defence and need to be secured by reliable commitment. Moreover, a comprehensive migration policy and a closer take on border management is of high importance for the internal dimension of European security, as is a more coordinated approach to cyber security and hybrid threats. Secondly, the European neighbourhood needs to be stable. In terms of periphery the EUGS draws a broader picture than the Eastern and Southern Partnership do, also including Central Asia and Sub-Saharan-Africa. In the given geographic frame, the decisive factor is the securing of **vital interests**. In the EUGS, these vital interests are formulated in the maintenance of the democratic system,

the territorial integrity and the prosperity of the EU. The violation of these key issues frames the decisive requirement for the EU to consider foreign engagement. Minimal interventionism moves for a very reluctant use of force taking instability spill over and second order problems into account. Consequently, action is only undertaken if these vital interests are threatened. Thirdly, as a trade power, free access to global commerce, international seas as well as space and cyber space is a vital interest for the Union. If access to these is interfered, the EU must intervene - so seen in Operation Atalanta off the Somalian coast. Fourthly, and lastly, supporting its partners in defending their sovereignty is in the EU's interest and engagement until the use of force is possible. Despite staying committed to its values and norms as well as undertaking massive efforts to defend these challenged norms within its borders, the EU has given up on regime change and democratisation as a foreign policy objective. However, democracy and democratisation stay a vocal foreign policy factor in the Union stabilising the neighbourhood and increasing reliability of partner countries and competing global players. Moreover, if the EU does not increase its influence in the broader neighbourhood, other countries will come and do so. In this light, credible partnership and capacity building for partner countries turn into a vital pillar of EU foreign policy. In that, the EU must find a way to assess the reliability of partner states and the congruency of objectives as they are a key requirement for effective capacity building in European interest. This scope of action gives a very precise picture of possible engagement and a credible strategy of minimal interventionism. The EU would have a clear guideline for its role in global conflicts and a credible position of strategic autonomy in the global system. However, building up a reliable and operational common military structure is essential for both the readiness to fulfil the envisaged tasks and the credible power projection to other global actors to be a serious foreign policy player.

The EU – a global player?

The EU must unite very different positions and approaches towards military action and intervention. It is for a good reason that foreign and security policy stayed the only intergovernmental pillar of the EU. Member States are highly reluctant to surrender core powers to the EU and security obviously stays at the heart of national sovereignty. In consequence, security integration in the EU has always been a slow and tough process of unanimity. Yet, Federica Mogherini could recently state that the EU had achieved more steps towards security integration in the last year than in the ten years before. The EU has converged from very different national traditions and positions towards the use of force and has lately established PESCO, the MPCC and the EDF, i.e. an effective common security policy might be achievable. However, this security policy must contain a common strategy towards foreign engagement to credibly perform within the above stated scope of action for minimal interventionism. In that, framing a strategy of minimal engagement in self-interest might be a credible compromise for states reluctant to the use of force.

In terms of global conflict management, the EU still is a normative power. Its objective is to solve conflicts rather than freezing or exploiting them. Long-lasting crisis solutions represent the only way to avoid instability and conflict in the future. Therefore, the EU needs to emphasise a more coordinated and anticipative, yet **integrated approach**. The intervention in Libya has shown that a strategy concerning the consequences of military action is necessary when acting with force. Furthermore, a clear pre-planning of an operation and a more detailed analysis beforehand are necessary to achieve strategic autonomy and to anticipate military

needs. The EU must turn its security policy from a reactive to a proactive instrument that makes it possible to prepare operations and to envisage scenarios of engagement. To achieve this, the EU must try to close the gap between the different Member States in order to increase its security capacities and capabilities and finally abolish the conceptual void of security policy.

Moreover, the EU ought to adapt to multiple massive disruptions and their consequences. In addition to the enormous changes in US foreign policy, China is a second world power that has a serious impact on the global situation and the periphery of the EU. With the Belt and Road project and the 16+1 format with Central and East European states, it puts massive pressure on the EU to act and increase the cooperation efforts with its eastern neighbours and show more sensitivity to the needs of its central eastern member states. Furthermore, hybrid threats such as terrorism, but also evolutions in the technology sector, the environment and the recent 'authoritarian wave' changed the balance of power. Therefore, the EU must stay committed to thinking in a global framework and keeping the changing world order on a multilateral track. The EU's role on the global stage traditionally has been economic. As a powerful trade bloc, the Union was able to set rules in economic terms as a trading partner. Stepping up its security policy would give the Union a greater impact on the balance of power in global politics. However, the EU should not aim for a position as an additional super power in the global system but rather help sustain the multilateral world order and reshape it in a European interest. With changing alliances and the drifting away of the US a more **theatre-specific approach** becomes key for the EU to act globally. That means to search for partners according to the needs and positions in certain policy fields. In a changing and increasingly diverse world, partnerships are fluid and the EU must learn to adapt to changing demands and coalitions of interest. That does not mean to leave the European values behind and to choose a Machiavellian approach of cooperation, but to look out for new partners that share an interest in certain fields and to cooperate to mutual benefit. This also counts for conflict management, where the search for partners for multilateral operations is crucial in order to adapt a new balance of power and to increase the legitimacy of intervention. Nevertheless, the EU must try to become a more credible and useful partner for the US to keep the transatlantic partners as close as possible and to reduce the risk of the USA completely giving up on the strategic partnership with Europe.

Conclusions and policy recommendations on the role of the EU in global conflicts

- The EU must reshape its foreign policy strategy to adapt to a changing world. It must develop a strategy towards global conflicts and intervention to face the challenges of shifting power relations and increased responsibility in the world and the neighbourhood. The main motive of this reshaped policy of the EU is strategic autonomy. While staying committed to multilateralism and the transatlantic partnership, Europe must become more independent of its partners. Territorial defence is still organised in transatlantic relations and this will stay so, which means that credible commitment is needed to keep ties as close as possible. However, in terms of external action the Union must increase its strategic autonomy from the traditional guarantor of stability, the USA, and take the lead to keep its neighbourhood stable. In global politics, the EU should aim for a theatre-specific approach enabling new policy-related partnerships and helping to rebalance recent global power shifts. Additionally, the EU should use its economic power and growing security influence to sustain the multilateral order and to fix increasing gaps in the transatlantic partnership while staying committed

to the idea of being a normative power and avoid using its newly gained power to be a major player by itself.

- A shift towards minimal interventionism in the approach of global conflicts would give a concrete profile to the EU foreign policy. With a reluctant approach of interventions the Union would avoid second and third order consequences and reduce the escalation of low-scale conflicts. Only in cases threatening vital EU interests the use of force should be an option. Yet, with the focus on this vital interest, the EU would sustain stability in its proximity and achieve security of trade and prosperity. Therefore, steps towards a more coordinated, adaptive and integrated approach of security policy should be undertaken. Emphasis should be set on long-lasting measures to secure sustainable peace in post-conflict scenarios. Furthermore, an essential factor of the EU's approach to conflict must be capacity-building with partnership countries to prevent conflicts in the broader European neighbourhood. The clearly defined scope of action should be complemented by a common strategy towards conflicts that enables well-prepared action. Lastly, increased common military capacities with high operational readiness and the capability to operate autonomously are vital for a power perception that enables to act credibly with minimal interventionism.

II. The EU and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

With regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the EU stated in its 2016 *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, that it seeks 'to preserve the prospect of a viable two-state solution based on 1967 lines with equivalent land swaps' in a multilateral framework, as well as 'to recreate the conditions for meaningful negotiations', and to 'promote full compliance with European and international law in deepening cooperation with Israel and the Palestinian Authority'. Within the current context, how can the EU fulfil its ambitions?

Israeli Dynamics

Although the two-state solution is still supported by roughly 50% of the Israeli population, there is little confidence with the general public that there is a true partner for peace on the Palestinian side. Moreover, many Israelis consider their country to be a villa in the jungle in need of strong protection. This idea is central to the discourse of the Israeli right. Although the ultranationalist segment within the right is relatively small, it is well organised and thus manages to dominate the public discourse. It claims that security should be the cornerstone for any Israeli policy, thus trumping all other interests and values. Moreover, it identifies Palestinians as a demographic threat to the survival of the Jewish identity of Israel. The EU is perceived as naively underestimating the dire position Israel is in.

Palestinian Dynamics

While the Palestinian Authority (PA) continues to push for the two-state solution, the popular support for this solution has dropped below 50%. Indeed, it is unlikely that a viable Palestinian state could develop in the current circumstances. The PA itself is losing support as well, since it is government perceived as ineffective and by some even as illegitimate. The ongoing occupation is the main reason for its limited power; other factors within the Palestinian leadership also contribute to the current deadlock. President Abbas's government acts increasingly authoritarian, thus eroding the democratic fabric of Palestine. New elections would

be crucial for the Palestinian leadership to regain credibility and legitimacy. The fragmentation of the Palestinian leadership is another problem. The existing divide between Fatah and Hamas is deepened by players like the EU that have put the latter on the terrorist list, which renders negotiations and cooperation difficult. Moreover, the EU strongly supports the security apparatus of the PA. This same apparatus is used to control the opposition against the PA.

EU Dynamics

Today, the EU is one of the last international players that, in line with its 2016 *Global Strategy*, systematically criticises the Israeli occupation and that calls for the protection of Palestinian human rights. Little as this seems to some, it is crucial that the EU continues to do so, especially since in the current geopolitical context, the idea that only the protection of human rights can be the basis for any sustainable political stability is increasingly marginalised. However, internal divisions render the implementation of the EU *Global Strategy* a challenge. Especially, the governments of the Visegrád Four – Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia – are assertively advocating for a change in the EU strategy and to bring it closer to that of the current USA administration, which strongly supports the Israeli agenda. Meanwhile, the USA seeks to strengthen its alliance with Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Jordan. Curbing Iranian regional influence and sharing intelligence are the main drivers of this new coalition. In this context, the Israeli government feels strengthened and untouchable. Nevertheless, for now, the EU has managed to keep the two-state solution on the table, as well as the UN Resolutions on which it was based.

Drafting EU Policies

Before formulating new policy recommendations, it is crucial to consider what frame the EU should choose for its policies and how to implement the recommendations once they are adopted. The *Global Strategy* uses the policy frame of enabling new negotiations, however since the negotiations are stalled for so many years, it is questionable whether there is any use in bringing people back to the table. As US President Trump argued: there is no point in repeating what has been tried. In the current context, pushing for new rounds of negotiations just boils down to upholding the status quo which enables the further *de facto* annexation of the West Bank. While the USA is working on 'the ultimate deal', the EU should opt for the frame of ensuring the relevance of final status issues: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with neighbours, and other issues of common interest. The EU should not silently accept a Palestine-minus, or the cancellation of the refugees' rights, while waiting for negotiations to happen.

The second crucial issue concerns the political will to implement recommendations. If it really wants, the EU can do much more to use its leverage to press Israel to end the occupation, especially since there is support in the European civil society to do so. To be an effective player rather than a payer, however, the EU should no longer put its trust in a multilateral approach, especially since the USA and Israel are systematically acting unilaterally. Based on its clear commitment to the two-state solution and the proposed frame of protecting the final status issues, one important step for the EU would be to recognize Palestine already now including its territorial integrity, since this also implies the non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the West Bank. Of course, such a unilateral step would cause a backlash from the Israeli public, especially if recognition would not be linked to a clear security agenda. Therefore, if the EU

would follow this path, it should also ensure understanding and support in the Israeli society through cooperation with Israeli platforms that offer society an agenda for effective change. Also, proposing such a recognition is likely to result in a further polarisation within the EU. However, this could be dealt with by adopting a multi-speed Europe approach as happens in other files as well.

In the meantime, other instruments are available to ensure the relevance of the final status issues, as, for instance, a more stringent implementation of the EU guidelines on the labelling of products originating from Israeli settlements, and even considering import restrictions following the Irish example; ensuring a strict distinction between Israel and the occupied territories in subsidy frameworks like Horizon 2020 and its successors; the introduction of a visa regime for Israeli's living in the settlements. When it comes to advocating for such measures, the EU should systematically counter all attempts to limit the space for human rights defenders and organisations that criticise Israeli policies and that propose such measures especially since they are firmly based in international law. Such a protection should also be extended to activists of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions Movement (BDS), since, as the EU itself has repeated systematically, calling for BDS is protected by the freedom of expression.

Case Study Jerusalem

In Jerusalem, three major developments indicate that the Israeli government has abandoned its strategy of managing the conflict, and is taking steps to implement final solutions.

Firstly, unilateral plans are proposed to implement and consolidate the concept of a Greater Jerusalem. This is one example of the Israeli aim to including and thus *de facto* annex West Bank settlements while at the same time denying Palestinian their rights and transferring them to other territories or to a different legal status. In the case of Jerusalem, the Greater Jerusalem plan might result in one third of the Palestinian Jerusalemites losing their permanent residency status since their neighbourhoods will be excluded from the Jerusalem Municipality. The attempt to expulse the Bedouin village of Khan al-Ahmar from its land is another example of the Israeli policy of population transfer. The 'Regularisation of Settlement in Judea and Samaria Law' that allows for the retro-active legalisation of settlements built on privately owned Palestinian land are a third case in point.

Secondly, the basic rights of Palestinians are denied by a systematic attack on both the Palestinian individual and collective home: communities are uprooted through evictions and security measures; families are separated through the denial of reunification permits and the revocation of residence permits; and there investments, planning and building permits are lacking in East Jerusalem.

Thirdly, the Israeli government seeks to strengthen its claim to and hold over the Old City through the strategic construction of settlements, touristic projects like cable cars, and new public transportation systems, as well as through evictions of Palestinians from the Old city and adjacent neighbourhoods. Thus, Israel undermines the possibility of East Jerusalem ever functioning as the capital of Palestine. In a similar vein, the *status quo* around the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif is challenged with increasing numbers of Israeli officials visiting the compound. In this respect, the move of the USA Embassy to Jerusalem set a dangerous precedent. It encourages other states to do the same. And already now, official meetings are

taking place in the USA Embassy that are also attended by representatives from EU Member States.

In the light of these developments, the EU has become more assertive in condoning settlement expansions in and around East Jerusalem. On the 31st of January 2018, the EU announced that it was ready to invest more in the Palestinian neighbourhoods. At the same time, there is no shared goal or coordinated campaign between the EU Member States to support the Palestinian presence. Moreover, economic support for Palestinian residents of Jerusalem is not effective, as long as the occupation continues. Today, the term 'resilience' pops up frequently in European documents. It seems to indicate that the EU admits that it can no longer do anything to change the situation on the ground. Only resilience is left. In short, it is time for a fundamental revision of EU policies.

Recommendations to the EU:

- Challenge unilateral plans to redraw the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem, including the often overlooked juridical transfer of Palestinians.
- Invest in and advocate for the possibilities of the Palestinian community to build resistance rather than resilience, including its right to have its own political institutions and to organise itself politically at grassroots level.
- Contribute to the socioeconomic development of East Jerusalem, but ensure that this does not turn into an alternative to a political solution for the conflict.
- Challenge the permanent residency system including the permit revocations and denial of family reunification.
- Ensure a full stop of housing evictions.
- Uphold the non-recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the whole of Jerusalem. This implies encouraging Member States to uphold their third state responsibility, for instance by condemning the USA Embassy move and not attending events at this Embassy, especially since it partly stands on no man's land.
- Emphasise the lasting relevance of the claim of Palestinians on property in West Jerusalem.

III. Recommendations to the EU on Syria

The EU should not repeat the difficult process to find a common policy on issues where there is internal disagreement. The Foreign Affairs Council's conclusions and position on reconstruction were correct, but there should be more emphasis on transitional justice. The EU should act mainly where others, individual states and other international organisations, cannot act.

The main pillars for EU policy should be:

- **Prevention of further instability in the Mediterranean.** This does require support to countries in the region, which is already substantial but there are also serious gaps. Lebanon e.g. receives substantial support, but not sufficient to deal with the demographic pressure after the arrival of 1.5 million Syrian refugees. Pledges for support are often not fully realised. Yet pledges of aid are not enough, a step to prevent further instability would be substantial burden sharing and practically substantial resettlement of Syrian refugees. The EU should lead by example.
- **Justice and accountability.** The EU should not waste time on finding the right model or blueprint but rather invest in realistic steps forward like increasing the funding for the IIIM mechanism. Member States should investigate the option of persecution of Syrian war criminals in national courts.
- **Promotion of Human Rights.** The EU should maintain HR standards, also with partner countries on stabilisation. Even with countries like Lebanon, despite the importance for stability, the EU should not be silent on HR violations, e.g. the recent death of four Syrians under torture in Lebanese prisons.
- **Mogherini** and the **EEAS** should be more courageous and lead in taking a stand on Syria rather than waiting for EU consensus. Mogherini should appoint a Syria representative.
- The EU has formulated a **Syria strategy** in 2017 which it has updated in 2018. The EU should not shy away from big politics and harder issues, even if consensus among Member States can be a challenge. On accountability and transitional justice the EU does support the IIIM and several smaller NGOs working on this, but in the end the EU can only facilitate and support, the process as such has to be owned by Syrians. Prosecuting war criminals in EU countries is a big challenge, the rule of universal jurisdiction is only followed in a few Member States and the departments are often understaffed.
- The EU is not really a geopolitical player and is not at all a military actor. Member States are involved mainly in the International Coalition against ISIS. The leverage the EU has concerning the situation on the ground in Syria is very limited. Assad is regaining control over a largely destroyed country with an uprooted population. Assad's allies might still have some interest in a negotiated settlement, but the Syrian government seems not to care about that at all. Probably the Syrian government does not even

want all the Syrian refugees to return, since this might lead to more instability in the re-conquered regions and the government is probably not only unwilling but also unable to provide services.

- It is important for the EU to get some leverage and have the possibility to play a role in negotiations. Currently the leverage is minimal, but some Member States can still play a role in negotiations with the regime, for instance to ensure access of ICRC to monitor the situation in jails. The negotiation process will be extremely difficult, but at least the EU and its Member States should give it a try.
- A growing Syria fatigue is noticeable, more on the side of policy makers and politicians than on the side of the general public. Among politicians there is a growing tendency to accept that the Assad regime stays in power. Yet dealing with the Assad regime will neither give Europe any leverage on the situation nor bring stability back in the country. A large part of the population is uprooted and often even actively expelled. The regime is not allowing for a return of the IDPs and refugees and is not ready to make any concessions in their direction at all. Starting direct engagement with the Assad regime will not change that situation.
- The EU and its Member States should explore whether there are **options other than the Geneva process**. Not the process of de-escalation zones which has proven to be a death trap. There is a large number of countries now somehow involved militarily in Syria, including EU Member States. The Syrian regime is also hugely depending on foreign support. Would there be a way for the EU to increase its impact on the situation in Syria through pressure on third countries intervening in Syria, for instance by increasing the political costs for intervening countries? There might be possibilities to increase pressure on Russia regarding its Syria policy; not so much on the human rights dimension but more on (regional) stability.

Still, sanctions are already in place and have proven to be very problematic. And in turn, even the Russians do not seem to have a clear idea how to pressure the Assad regime. The main objective of Russia in the region seems to be to limit the influence of the West. Maybe there are more possibilities to pressure Iran.

- The focus always needs to lie on negotiations. A potential angle would be to limit arms trade.
- The EU should realise that a substantial part of the refugees in the region and in Europe is not going back to Syria; they simply have no homes to return to. For the refugees in Europe, the EU and its Member States should not focus on return but on a more permanent presence. Europe should be able to handle that. Also, the EU should prepare with countries in the region for a more permanent stay of refugees. Another priority of the EU should be justice and accountability. All in all, the EU seems to expect to have big impact with a very limited input.

*The **Astana process** left Europe aside, but was very helpful for both the Assad regime and Turkey. This way Russia has facilitated the re-entrance of Turkey in the political process in Syria. Turkey's strongest interest is to maintain control over the Kurdish presence, limit any autonomous region to east of the Euphrates and keep the PYD controlled areas landlocked. It looks like Turkey is going to stay in Syria for a long time. Other than Russia, Iran is unhappy with the new strong role of Turkey.*

What the EU could do at this stage is:

- Increase pressure on the ground and engage with the US in northern and southern Syria.
- See that the US stays involved and does not totally withdraw from Syria.
- Develop an integrated policy on Turkey and Syria.
- Play a role in preventing escalation in Idlib.
- Create new entry points.
- Not give up on negotiations with anyone.
- Realise that the Syria conflict has not yet entered the final stage.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations on the refugee situation

The emerging consensus among the EU Member States on the refugee situation is tilting in favour of sealing the borders and pushing back migrants from the European shores. Control, deterrence and outsourcing responsibilities in cooperation with the third countries are the principles that seem to carry the day. This trend has been confirmed by the recent EU Council summit on 28 & 29 June 2018. Since refugee and migration issues have started to dominate the EU agenda they have become the most common political currency to be traded off against other issues (debt, trade privileges, financial support). It has also caused deep division in Europe as well as within EU Member States, fuelling the rise of the right wing parties. In the absence of a common EU migration policy EU Member States seem to give preference to unilateral, national options. At EU level, apart from relocation schemes and the EU Coastal Guard all other measures have been undertaken outside the EU Treaty and without the consent of the European Parliament (Turkey agreement, closure of Schengen borders, EU hot spots).

The refugee and migration 'crisis' was, in fact, never about refugees and migrants, but rather a crisis of values and a political crisis.

The following recommendations could help defining a future European refugee policy.

- **Monitoring the progress of the EU facility for refugees in Turkey**

The 2016 EU - Turkey deal ('statement') has often been touted as a success story. It indeed helped to reduce the number of illegal crossings and provided legal entry for refugees and asylum seekers. At present there are still about 3,5 million refugees in Turkey who have been granted temporary protection status. Due to the lack of an official refugee status the conditions of many of these refugees do not meet international standards of protection. Despite some improvements the gap between rhetoric and reality persists. Many refugees suffer in inadequate reception centres and are often forced to work in the informal labour market. Differences in treatment of Syrian and other refugees keep recurring. Access to legal assistance and legal advice shortages, combined with inefficient judicial system persist, hampering long term integration perspectives for a number of refugees.

The EU should do more to ensure better integration of refugees in Turkey by investing further in a social safety net and empowering NGO's which help facilitating access to housing, healthcare and education for a number of refugees in Turkey.

- **Meeting challenges of stranded refugees and migrants in Greece**

The situation in Greece is now far better compared to the 2015/2016 humanitarian crisis. Nevertheless around 50 000 migrants and refugees are still facing an uncertain future. Reception conditions on the mainland and hotspots on the Greek islands differ considerably, with hotspots being similar to detention centres.

EU countries are greatly divided over migration and refugee issues. Countries on the periphery have been always more concerned with arrivals of either refugees or illegal migrants than the countries on the continent which are more interested in defending the Dublin principles stipulating the responsibilities for reception and registration to the first country of arrival. In the absence of solidarity regarding relocation and resettlement, policies associated with containment and deterrence have become the favoured solutions of Member State governments, easy to sell to the populAt the same time possibilities for legal migration are hardly existent (initiatives such as the 'Blue card' for highly qualified migrants have very limited success).

Europe needs to find agreement on a common and comprehensive migration policy based on human rights. The fight against illegal migration will be much more effective if the EU opens up borders to legal migration. Despite the difficulty to make such a policy politically palatable in the current circumstances, this option is the only workable in the long run.

Overcoming the crisis of values and tackling the root causes of immigration

Right wing parties are on the rise all around Europe, including in Sweden which is traditionally associated with tolerance and respect for human rights. They successfully managed to instrumentalise the issue of refugees and migration which in turn caused the traditional mainstream parties' shift to the right. That the global order is in flux has ushered in political instability and has routed people around the world.

With EU countries deeply divided over long term solutions to refugee and migration flows protection of external borders appears as the quickest effective solution. Other legal means such as humanitarian visas and other legal migration options are systematically blocked by the EU Council. Dissonance within the EU including opposition put up by the former East European countries to express solidarity and take responsibility to reallocate refugees and migrants is not very helpful either.

Nevertheless, common ground could be found on the proposition that tackling the root causes in the countries of origin of migration including bad governance, climate change and poverty eradication can provide sustainable solution in the future. In addition, allowing for legal migration would not only discourage illegal movements, but would help make up for the Europe's aging population and shortage of labour in particular segments of the economy. Europe has a collective responsibility to prevent the death of migrants in transit and manage migration as an ongoing reality.

- **Options against a background of lacking solidarity**

Populism has been in part fuelled by the notorious lack of solidarity among EU countries. Recent incidents in the Mediterranean when boats overcrowded with refugees and migrants

were refused access to the nearby EU Member States revealed the depth of discord. A solution was eventually found when a few countries offered to host a certain number of the rescued migrants in their countries.

Emerging 'coalitions of the willing', i.e. the countries ready to share the burden of refugees and asylum seekers could be the way out of the impasse caused by the lack of internal EU solidarity. EU heads of states or governments also reaffirmed the voluntary principles on the basis of which the transfer and reception of those who are saved should be ensured by the countries willing to share the effort.