

EUROPE AND THE TRUE MEANING OF INTERNATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

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GUANYADOR DEL PREMI "CATALUNYA EUROPA SEGLE XXI" 2013

At this year's Munich Security Conference, the announcement of a new, more active foreign policy by Germany's political elite made for a much-noticed highlight. For many years now, Germany's military restraint is considered to be superseded and irresponsible, given Germany's political and economic power. However, this announcement being followed by actual results is highly improbable in a military adverse society such as the German one. Recent polls regarding Germany's military engagement in the world, confirm that the so-called "culture of restraint" is indeed not just a foreign policy strategy of the last government but an anti-militaristic culture that has been established in Germany's society over the last 70 years. The political elite in Germany might have a different impression of international security policy but is, on the long run, unable to withstand polls, pundits and the rules of regional elections.

If one takes into account France and the UK, the other decisive actors in European security policy, into account, it becomes obvious that Germany's unique "culture of restraint" is not the only reason why plans to deploy a European Army have been abandoned and why the so-called EU Battle groups only exist on paper. Besides differing national interest, France perceives itself much more as an independent global actor and has preference for a French-led European Security Framework while the UK tends to foster its old transatlantic ties with the USA and NATO. As a consequence the European integration in terms of the Common

Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) stagnates and has seemingly reached natural limits.

One may find this regrettable, as the opportunity is missed to engage military responses to international conflicts that are independent from the USA and based on a multilateral system of values rather than national interests. However, one does certainly not have to find this regrettable because the role of the EU in the world doesn't depend on the capability to autonomously conduct war. The experience over the last 15 years clearly indicates that military interventions are extremely risky, hard to control and tend to rather increase the violence instead of ending it. It is certain however that any debate on military involvement on behalf of Europe hides the actual weakness in its alleged key competence: the economic and political exertion of influence.

This lack of influence has become visible in a number of difficult international conflicts and crisis situations. Neither the EU nor its most significant member states have achieved to play a decisive role in the political reconstruction of the now unstable Mediterranean neighborhood. In the Middle East conflict as well as in the international nuclear dispute with Iran, the states of the European Union have taken different

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positions and have preferred different strategies. Most obvious however, is that the EU and its member states are unable to defend and force through their values and standpoints towards other major global actors like the USA, China and Russia.

Whether it is the NSA scandal, the open defiance of human rights or territorial saber-rattling in Asia and Eastern Europe, the European Union frequently evades real confrontation and therefore it contradicts not only its own policies but also the promises made to international partners. The credibility and impact of European diplomacy are suffering largely from this attitude, and so it is not surprising that the Chinese and Russian style pragmatism – although in its essence pure self-serving power politics - is often preferred over the European ambiguity.

In some fields of foreign policy this European ambiguity may pass as an unpleasant realpolitik without any alternative. After all, the EU is a unique international actor that is constrained in legal as well as public legitimation and has, unlike nation-states, to combine incoherent national policy styles and interests. Nevertheless, the EU has a unique set of historic relations in every corner of the world, is practically in charge of regulating international commerce with the USA and is well represented in the most important international political and economic organizations. In urgent humanitarian crisis, leaving this potential untapped can have severe consequences, demonstrated in Syria as a worst-case scenario. The fear of confronting in Russia, a major supplier of resources and important trading partner, enabled one of the worst humanitarian catastrophes of the 21st century. Yet again, the failure of the EU doesn't consist in not having intervened militarily; Syria became so quickly a blueprint for one of these unsolvable and utterly painful involvements that a military strike was ever since the beginning by far the worst of all possible solutions. The failure consists in being unable to propose a persuasive compromise and unwilling to exert significant pressure on the Russian position, which would have been essential

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for a political solution. The EU doesn't have and has never had a clear political strategy neither for Syria nor for the wider region which has been infected by the conflict.

Why then, do the pros and cons of a military intervention so often dominate the debate about international engagement and responsibility? The reason might be that a missing military engagement can often be rightfully defended with historic, moral and also solid logical reasons, as well as it is always another opportunity to emphasize the alternative nature of European Foreign Policy. One should not forget however, that international crisis management is the geopolitical equivalent of moral courage in everyday life. For anyone who is capable to act, just closing the eyes in front of immediate injustice and violence is not an option; even if it has to do with secure gas supply and lucrative free trade agreements are at stake. The true international responsibility of the EU is to conduct policies and diplomacy that consistently represent its values whoever the recipient is, since its significance as a reliable partner and assertive negotiator stands and falls with the credibility of its rhetoric and the integrity of its actions. In the reality of international conflicts this means to target and confront not only the rough regimes who are responsible for these conflicts but also those who prevent political solutions and are thus increasing and perpetuating violence and suffering. Otherwise Europe risks staying just the weakest contestant in cynical power politics in which its identity and its values are condemned to remain invisible.