

The European Union as a Credible Global Actor: a workshop to discuss the forthcoming EU Global Strategy

On 4 and 5 April 2016, the European Centre at the Department of Politics and International Studies hosted a workshop on the forthcoming EU Global Strategy. Recent crises such as the mass movements of refugees from North Africa and the Middle East, the conflict in Ukraine and the advancement of ISIL have raised questions about whether the EU is capable of reacting effectively in a rapidly changing and complex world. These crises have blurred the lines between domestic and foreign politics, requiring a truly comprehensive approach. Despite or because of these crises, the EU has decided to draw up a new EU Global Strategy (EUGS) for foreign security and policy to be prepared by the EU High Representative (HR) this year. This document will assess the current global environment and the EU's strategy to steer its global action and set priorities. In view of the impact of past Strategies, the importance of this new report may be questioned, beginning with whether the HR can present the findings in a way that is acceptable to Member States and credible to its allies and to third countries.

These questions provided a basis for bringing together policy experts, established scholars, junior researchers and PhD students from Belgium, Germany, the Czech Republic and the UK. This workshop focused on research and policy implication, testing new ideas on practitioners and scholars. It investigated the EU's capacity to take decisions and respond efficiently and effectively using common policy instruments, especially in addressing crises. The workshop was opened by Dr Geoffrey Edwards, Deputy Director of the European Centre and Dr Julie Smith, Director of the European Centre and Baroness of Newnham. In his opening lecture, Dr Edwards outlined the British contribution to the EUGS, which has been dominated by the UK's domestic issues and transatlantic relations, among other factors. Mr Hans Kundani, Senior Transatlantic Fellow at the German Marshall Fund of the United States presented Germany's approach to the Global Strategy from the perspective of the evolution of German foreign policy. In their keynote lectures, Mr Julian Fricke from the Strategic Planning Division of the European External Action Service outlined the main ideas and process of the preparation of the EUGS. Professor Sven Biscop, Director of the Europe in the World programme at the Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations in Brussels, pointed out to the need to make the EUGS operational and realistic, and yet ambitious.

Postdoctoral researchers and PhD students from the universities of Cologne, Mainz, Prague and Cambridge discussed a range of policy areas of the EU CFSP, including the EU Eastern Partnership, public diplomacy, recent refugee crisis, conflict resolution, mediation, crisis management, development cooperation, democracy assistance, and partnership with Russia and China. Based on their empirical research, presenters attempted to evaluate progress made, and identify future needs as well as policy recommendations for further strengthening EU capacity and capability to act as a global player. Presentations were discussed and commented by Dr Smith (Cambridge University), Professor Arne Niemann (Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz), Dr Tomáš Weiss (Charles University Prague), and Dr Edwards (University of Cambridge).

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Workshop conveners: Dr Geoffrey Edwards and Vladimir Kmec.