

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
Europe's World, Autumn 2006

Responding to:

Jan Truszczyński
Eyewitness to the birth of the EU's common security culture

Sir,

Jan Truszczyński was right to define the development of a European security "culture" as a key objective (*Europe's World*, Summer 2006). A shared culture requires a deeper and more sustainable effort than simply devising strategies and agreeing common positions, even though the latter are necessary components of a functioning policy. If Europe is to make a truly significant impact on international security it needs to forge shared core attitudes, approaches and behaviour.

The European Security Strategy (ESS) seeks to define not only a new set of policy aims and objectives but also a new approach to tackling security threats that includes a much stronger emphasis on conflict prevention. Conceptually, this is a welcome departure from the more customary firefighting approach of crisis management. In practical terms, it means applying a very wide range of policy instruments to a potential problem throughout its gestation, not simply trying to take remedial action after the event. In other words, we need to stretch the spectrum of our engagement with security challenges – getting involved sooner and staying on longer to repair damage, rather than just putting out the flames.

Having set out its new approach, it is nevertheless important that the EU does not over-extend either its expectation or commitment. At present there are very real limits to what the EU can achieve, when it should get involved and its available resources. The Common Foreign and Security Policy annual budget was until recently only some €60m, and for 2007-2013 it looks set to rise to around €300m. Good news, but before we get too carried away, it is the equivalent of what the United Kingdom spends on defence every two days.

If the EU is to retain international credibility and to regain the confidence of sceptical national electorates, it would do well to proceed through measured and focused actions. Countless EU resolutions and communications rapidly lose currency unless they are acted upon, and the ESS will soon fall into disrepute if it cannot be effectively implemented.

The best way forward is probably organic development. Cultures are not 'constructed' overnight; they need to evolve through practice, interaction and experience. The particular security interests of individual European nation states are unlikely ever to be synonymous, but the more they work together to tackle

common problems the more they will appreciate the benefits of collective action, and the more their interests are likely to converge.

A series of relatively modest but successful interventions by the EU can be knitted together to comprise something greater than the sum of the parts. This may not be as grand or dramatic as some would like, but the EU would benefit far more from a number of small victories than risk a spectacular failure from which its credibility could take a long time to recover.

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