International Politics

How Security Challenges Shaped **the European Union's Common Foreign Policy**

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Abstract

The invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 reminded Europe of long-forgotten perils after the many decades of peace it had enjoyed since the end of the Second World War. Following initial hesitation, the European Union created a somewhat cohesive response, taking in internally displaced people and supplying Kyiv with logistical support – from medical help to the latest, most advanced weapons available.

This was one of those rare moments where the Union had a common approach to foreign policy, prompting the question of just how vital it is to have a consensus on how to act in foreign policy, to be able to create a cohesive and capable security policy. Based on this premise, this report will analyse how three key moments in international history (the 9/11 attacks, the wave of terror in 2015 and, more recently, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia) have shaped the EU's approach to foreign relations and how have they affected Europe's role as a security agent.

These events triggered different responses that are fundamental to understanding how Europe's attitudes have evolved with time in terms of foreign and security policy and the need to have a common strategy: the aftermath of the Twin Towers' attack, on 11 September 2001 in the United States of America, caught the European Union by surprise, with no idea as to how to proceed. That surprise eventually lead to NATO taking charge of all actions leading up to, and including, the invasion of Iraq in 2003, such as supporting Turkey with surveillance aircraft and missile defence systems, helping Poland with logistical support and – from 2004 to 2011 – helping train Iraqi forces. However, 14 years later, in 2015, the European Union displayed unity and cohesion in its act following the attacks suffered in France and Belgium, such as the Bataclan massacre in November 2015 in Paris.

Fast forwarding to 2022, the war in Ukraine represented a return to the divided Europe of the Cold War. However, what was seen was an almost unilateral defence of Ukraine by non-belligerent means, with a solidified European effort to ensure Kyiv was well armed and prepared to hold for as long as needed, continuing even after Russia was forced to retreat. The war also represented a shift in Europe's foreign policy, adopting a much stronger hard-line stance compared to softer approaches attempted with Russia in the years leading up to 2022.

Finally, it is also fundamental to look at potential fields where the Union can create a pioneer common policy approach that touches upon both external affairs and internal security. Geographically speaking, Africa and the Mediterranean present themselves as the most significant of those potential fields, being close to Europe and areas where the European Union has always been invested. Another field, albeit a thematic one, would be the field of disinformation and how to counter China's and Russia's actions, such as propaganda or electoral fraud. The African continent

represents a clear opportunity that Europe must utilise, offering closer and horizontal partnerships with nations at risk of giving up ground to Chinese and Russian interests, which has already happened in some countries – such as the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo – where Russian influence has caused issues for European interests. The vacuum, left after countries such as the United Kingdom or France withdrew from the region, has been filled by Russia ensuring Africa's help in crucial issues such as access to key minerals, such as platinum, gold or diamonds, or oil and gas reserves, and receiving its support in the UN's General Assembly. Here, the role of European Member States, such as Portugal, play a pivotal role in promoting the European Union's interests when considering the good relations it maintains with its former colonies in Africa. Portugal can serve as a bridge connecting both regions and help to counter Russia's and China's growing influence in the region through its ties to countries such as Angola or Mozambique.

Content

Chapter I: The Early Days

The European Union's 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' has, as its main goal, 'to preserve peace and strengthen international security in accordance with the principles of the United Nations Charter' (European Commission, n/d), thus promoting and upholding a system of rule-based international relations.

By 1945, after two devastating global wars, it was evident that Europe needed a stable, peaceful continent and the best way to achieve that was through the integration of its countries. The development of the European Union and its expansion ushered in an era of unheard peace, so much so that it became known as the Pax Europaea, a throwback to the time when Europe was one under the banner of the Roman Empire. The need for a common policy regarding foreign and security affairs was obvious, and that meant working abroad to prevent threats from arising. Alongside European integration, transatlantic cooperation was also fostered with the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, understanding the importance of integration did not mean that, in the early days of the European Economic Community (EEC), there was a coherent approach to foreign relations, with those decisions largely being left to the Member States themselves. The subsequent decades would see an organic growth towards a common foreign and security policy, with events such as the birth of the European Council in 1974 and the first informal meeting of foreign ministers in Germany. The establishment of a Common Foreign and Security Policy would not materialise until a couple of years later, with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which then entered into force in 1993.

The Maastricht Treaty, essentially the European Union's founding document, established three pillars for its organisation: the European Community pillar (that mostly handled economic themes such as the single market and common policies for agriculture and fisheries), the common foreign and security policy pillar (that was responsible for foreign aid, peacekeeping and promoting democracy and human rights) and, lastly, the police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters pillar (that concerned itself with criminal and judicial issues such as organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking). Around this time in 1997, the role of a High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy was created and, in 2009, with the Treaty of Lisbon, that position evolved into the current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The Treaty of Lisbon also added roles that the title did not previously have, such as representing the European Union abroad which, up until then, was represented by the foreign minister of the country in charge of the European Union's presidency. For the first time, the European Union had a de facto foreign minister of its own.

The Common Foreign and Security Policy comprises the European Union's decisions on foreign policy, particularly in the fields of defence and security diplomacy, such as peacekeeping and military and civilian conflict prevention missions. The Common Foreign and Security Policy's objectives are the promotion of peace both within and outside the European space, the promotion of democracy and respect for human rights and fostering cooperation and multilateralism while guaranteeing Europe's safety.

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John Peterson, Professor of International Politics at the University of Edinburgh and an expert on US-Europe relations, made the prophetic statement in 2002 that the post-9/11 world would see 'a more united, integrated Europe' (Peterson, 2002). Consequently, in December 2003 the European Council approved a new strategic document for security that admitted that the new security challenges were far too complex to deal with unilaterally. The European Security Strategy, as the document was known, established objectives for advancing security interests while abiding by the European Union's values. It identified key security issues such as terrorism and organised crime, the continued proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change and cybersecurity, and defended multilateral cooperation as the most effective way to tackle these challenges (European Security Strategy, 2009). This led the EU to later take on a multilateralist stance, materialised in the creation of the European Defence Agency. 2003 also saw the Union run its first two missions: a policing mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a military mission in what is now North Macedonia. Launched in January 2003, the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the first mission to come from the creation of the European Common Security and Defence Policy. Originally planned to last 3 years, the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina asked for the operation to continue, until it finally ended in June 2012. Following the work started by the United Nations International Police Task Force, the European Union's mission had as its main objective the restructuring of the local police force so that it would be a professional force in line with its European counterparts. The mission helped Bosnia and Herzegovina's police with internal reforms and prepared it to fight organised crime.

On 31 March 2003, the European Union began Operation Concordia, in what is now North Macedonia, previously the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Around 300 European soldiers took over NATO's mission to protect the monitors from both the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in charge of guaranteeing the implementation of the peace settlement between Macedonia's Albanian population and the government. The operation, handled in close cooperation with NATO, ended in December of the same year, with the European soldiers replaced by police officers. Both missions in Macedonia helped create better relations between the country and the European Union, based on transparency and reform.

Since 2012, the European Union's approach to its Common Security and Defence Policy missions has seen the involvement of over 2 000 civil servants in Europe, Africa and the Middle East working to limit the growth of possible threats to Europe, articulating diplomacy and defence, with an emphasis in bettering the rule of law and compliance with human rights while fighting terrorism and organised crime (European Security Strategy, 2009).

Despite all of the steps the European Union has taken to have an integrated approach to foreign policy, it is still a difficult subject. Decisions regarding the Common Foreign and Defence Policy are subjected to a unanimous vote taken by the Council of the European Union. The impact this has on decision making is clear to the European Union

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itself. In her first State of the Union speech, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, suggested that for votes on sanctions and humans rights the Council use a qualified voting majority instead. That would mean that votes could pass if they had the support of 55% of the countries, and must represent 65% of the population of the European Union. Facing unprecedent geopolitical challenges posed by Russia and China, the European Parliament has suggested that what is needed is the creation of a convention to revise the treaties that control the European Council's votes. On top of the use of the qualified voting majority, Members of the European Parliament suggested ending the possibility of vetoes as well, to avoid delays such as that suffered when the Council tried to pass sanctions on Belarus in 2020 that were vetoed by Cyprus. Serious reform is still a distant possibility, but to Viktor Szép, an expert on the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy, the time to do it is in 2023, with the Czech presidency of the Council having sent all Member States a letter with suggestions of policies that should be voted on using the qualified majority system (Szép, 2023).

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Chapter II: 9/11 and its Impact on EU Policy

The attack on the Twin Towers in the United States of America on 11 September 2001 changed the way Europe viewed terrorism and how to counter it. While previously the EU lacked political will to intervene more directly in counter-terrorism efforts and played a limited role at international level – as it was seen as an issue to be dealt with internally – after 9/11 and the subsequent attacks in Madrid, on 11 March 2004, and in London, on 7 July 2005, the EU understood the need to urgently act both within and beyond its borders. After 9/11, which resulted in a newfound focus on the Middle East by the United States, Europe began to understand that it had to take responsibility for its security into its own hands. Paradoxically, the subsequent war in Iraq, in 2003, caused some fractures in internal European cohesion, with some countries supporting the war effort (mainly the United Kingdom, Spain, Portugal and Italy) and other Member States opposing it (chiefly France and Germany, but also Belgium and Luxembourg). This, however, can be seen as the first moment at which the EU understood its potential to shepherd a geopolitical role in the global sphere. However, before expanding its action beyond its borders, the EU had to act internally and align all Member States in the same direction.

After the 9/11 terror attacks, there was a surge in the international focus on terrorism, leading to the implementation of various security policies in EU Member States. These policies not only aimed to address terrorism within domestic borders, but to also demonstrate to the United States that the EU was a dependable actor in these collective efforts (Argomaniz, 2009). As such, the EU approved its first multi-dimensional Action Plan focused on combating terrorism, in which some of the security measures involved were in the field of civil aviation security, police and judicial cooperation and terrorism financing. As the 9/11 attacks illustrate, terrorism is a transnational threat, thus, external action was another security measure taken by the EU (Argomaniz, 2009). An additional important decision was that taken in June 2002, with the Framework Decision on combating terrorism, which aligned all EU Member States in recognising that terrorism is a special offence and resulted in a common definition of terrorism adopted by the Member States (EUR-Lex, 2002). Beyond these security measures, at institutional level, the strengthening of institutions with further resources and competences, such as the Europol and the CEPOL (the European Police College), was another measure implemented by the EU. In fact, counter-terrorism efforts gained centre stage in the EU and its policies. However, despite the incremented political will and collective decisions, the implementation efforts and translation into action by all Member States were relatively poor.

The attacks in Madrid in March 2004 acted, however, as a turning point for the EU and its Member States. The attacks meant that the EU was also vulnerable and had to act swiftly to find answers and to accelerate the implementation of actions. As such, the EU urged its Member States to put the security measures into practice and developed new actions to specifically strengthen police and intelligence collaboration within and between EU Member States and European bodies (Council of the European Union, 2004). Other initiatives were also taken, such as border control with the inclusion of biometrics in passports, response and crisis coordination management, infrastructure

protection and enhanced judicial cooperation and information exchange (Argomaniz, 2009). Two additional crucial measures were implemented. First, with the designation of a Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, primarily tasked with ensuring coordination and the transposition of European measures to all Member States, and second, the prevention and combatting of radicalisation, which became a priority for the EU.

In the subsequent year, in July 2005, London experienced significant terrorist attacks, prompting substantial changes and expediting the implementation of measures. Aligned with this, the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy was devised, consisting of four pillars to steer actions in this domain. Crucially, following these attacks, the importance of adopting preventive measures, especially understanding processes of radicalisation and recruitment, along with repressive measures, gained prominence to enhance the effectiveness of counter-terrorism actions (Council of the European Union, 2005). Additional measures were undertaken to comprehend the multidimensional nature and complexity of the threat. These include addressing recruitment and homegrown radicalisation, developing a communication strategy and promoting intercultural dialogue. Moreover, the establishment of a European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) took place, with its primary responsibility being to control European borders and safeguard against the infiltration of terrorism (Argomaniz, 2009).

Besides the internal security policies and actions, the fight against terrorism has also become a key element in the context of the EU's foreign policy and external action, enabling the EU to gradually affirm itself as an international security actor by implementing external strategic action (Matera, 2014). Prior to the events of 9/11, the European Union had limited involvement in counter-terrorism cooperation with third countries. Nevertheless, since that period, the EU's participation in such efforts has broadened considerably, demonstrating notable advancements within a relatively brief timeframe. While domestic terrorism and homegrown radicalisation persist in Europe, a significant portion of the European Union's focus has shifted towards international terrorist organisations, particularly Al-Qaeda and its affiliated groups. The occurrence of both successful attacks and thwarted plots highlighted that the terrorist threat against Europe emanated from regions such as North Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan. This heightened attention was fuelled by suspicions of the involvement of groups from these regions in terrorist activities within Europe. Additionally, the recruitment of European citizens to these organisations and their acquisition of military training outside Europe raised concerns among European authorities, prompting the extension of the EU's counter-terrorism measures beyond its borders (MacKenzie, 2010).

Before discussing EU external action, it is necessary to distinguish foreign policy from the external dimension. The external dimension of counter-terrorism implies an extension of an already existing internal policy to other non-EU countries (MacKenzie, 2010). This is the case of the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) policy area, in which various EU internal security policies concerning counter-terrorism were extended to neighbouring countries, namely EU counter-terrorism in the Mediterranean (Wolff, 2009). In opposition, counter-terrorism foreign policy means that the action does not exist as an internal policy. As such, the EU strategically incorporated assistance

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to third countries into its counter-terrorism framework during the Council of Europe Summit of Seville in June 2002 (MacKenzie, 2010). At this summit, the EU resolved to initiate political dialogue with third countries aimed at collaborative efforts against terrorism, non-proliferation and arms control. Furthermore, the EU committed to offering technical assistance to support countries beyond Europe in their efforts to combat terrorism, while also incorporating anti-terrorism clauses into agreements with these nations (Wright, 2006). Besides these efforts, the fight against money laundering and terrorism financing have also been at the core of the EU's external actions. These examples of measures contributed to positioning the EU as a credible global security actor, mainly for the attention of the United States. In this context of counter-terrorism foreign policy, the United States has consistently been recognised as the EU's foremost and enduring partner, resulting in a mutual beneficial relationship since 2001 (Kaunert, 2009). The mutual advantages for both parties have led to the establishment of various collaborative counter-terrorism agreements, including co-operation between Europol and the United States; key liaison points connecting judicial authorities of the US and the EU; judicial agreements on legal and extradition assistance; passenger name record (PNR) agreements; and the 'SWIFT Agreement' (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) or Terrorist Financing and Tracking Programme (TFTP) (MacKenzie, 2010). The collaboration agreements had a significant impact by acknowledging the European Union as a committed partner in the United States' counter-terrorism efforts. This recognition was highlighted by improved efficiency gains, particularly in the streamlined sharing of data with the entire EU entity rather than individual entities (Kaunert, 2009; MacKenzie, 2010).

This mutual beneficial collaboration was motivated by terrorist attacks and a shared perception of threat coming from international terrorism. In 2004, the German Marshall Fund, an American public policy think tank, conducted a survey that assessed how Europeans and Americans perceived the threat and which measures they preferred. Although perception of the threat was comparable, with 71% of Europeans and 76% of Americans sharing concerns about international terrorism, their preferred responses differed significantly. Americans favoured a military-based response (54%), while Europeans showed a limited preference for this option (28%) (Kaunert, 2010). However, analytical pieces concluded the ineffectiveness and counter-productivity of military approaches in the fight against terrorism, highlighting that a whole-of-society approach offers more successful opportunities (e.g. Dews, 2021; Knoope, 2021; Thrall & Goepner, 2017). Subsequently, this has become the preferred approach for the EU.

Beyond the collaboration between the EU and the United States, Europe has predominantly favoured a diplomatic approach as a crucial component of efforts to curb the expansion and impact of terrorist attacks. In contrast to the United States' Global War on Terror approach, widely acknowledged as a failure and catalyst for increased terrorism, the EU has historically emphasised diplomacy and the use of soft-power measures in its counter-terrorism strategy. Following the 9/11 attacks, the United States pursued a reactionary approach, leading to notable mistakes and enduring consequences, including instability in the Middle East. Conversely, the EU perceived this moment as an opportunity to demonstrate its reliability as a partner to the United States and assert itself as a growing international actor in the fight against terrorism.

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Despite the prior experiences of European countries in dealing with internal threats, such as Spain's struggle against ETA, the United Kingdom's battle with the IRA, Italy's challenges with the Brigate Rosse and Germany's fight against the Red Army Faction, the EU lacked a centralised and common approach to terrorism, especially on an international scale within European borders.

The 9/11 attacks prompted the EU to initiate the development and consolidation of key instruments of foreign policy on counter-terrorism. However, Member States acted poorly in their execution of these instruments. The pivotal shift occurred with the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, which had a profound domestic impact. The significance of these attacks is reflected in the European Day for Victims of Terrorism, observed on 11 March – the day of the Madrid attacks. These events compelled the EU to reevaluate its approach to international terrorism, particularly as the attacks were perpetrated by homegrown terrorists affiliated with Al-Qaeda. This international terrorist organisation demonstrated the capability to attract and recruit Europeans within European borders, leaving the EU powerless in protecting its citizens. In response, the EU felt a compelling need to introspect and promptly implement the instruments and coordinated actions that had existed on paper.

Crucially, the EU's preferred approach diverged from that of the United States, rejecting a reliance on military power to combat terrorism. Grounded in fundamental European values and adherence to international law, the EU opted for a soft-power and integrated approach. More recently, in 2021, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy said that 'responding to terrorism and violent extremism by force and military might alone will not help to win hearts and minds' and, as such, the EU had 'taken an integrated approach, addressing the root causes of violent extremism, cutting off terrorists' financing sources and curbing terrorist content online' (Borrell, 2021), working in tandem with national governments, such as Russia, Pakistan and India, as well as regional organisations to fight terrorism abroad and limit its expansion into Europe.

Overall, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, as well as subsequent events in Madrid and London, a noteworthy transformation occurred in the European Union's perception of terrorism. Unlike the previously encountered ethno-nationalist terrorism present in Europe, these events compelled the EU to collectively acknowledge terrorism as a global menace, with a front seat in the EU security policies. Consequently, the necessity for collaboration with third countries became imperative to address this foreign threat. The two principles of collective action and international cooperation have progressively integrated into European foreign policy: firstly, driven by the imperative to demonstrate to the United States its capability to function as an international actor in counter-terrorism; and secondly, in response to the urgency imposed by attacks on European soil, prompting swift and resolute action. While certain scholars have expressed scepticism regarding the efficacy of EU measures, citing dependence on the will of all Member States and a perceived gap between policy formulation and implementation, the reality is that during this period, the EU laid the groundwork for more effective collective action (Argomaniz, 2012; Monar, 2015; Brown, 2010). This approach, grounded in European fundamental rights and extending beyond national

borders to involve third countries and civil society, demonstrated to be more effective than a purely military approach – and for this, the EU deserves all the credit.

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Chapter III: 2015 and Terrorism in Europe

Compared to its reaction to 9/11, Europe had a different approach to the wave of attacks perpetrated first by Al-Qaeda, and then by the Islamic State (IS, otherwise known as Daesh) in 2015. Starting in January 2015 with Charlie Hebdo, a series of deadly attacks on European soil occurred, in which France was by far the most affected country, with 148 citizens having died due to terrorist violence in 2015 alone. Across the European continent, the number of Islamist-inspired terrorist attacks jumped from 4 in 2014 to 17 in 2015, resulting in 150 casualties and 687 arrests, according to the European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, an annual report developed by Europol (Europol, 2016).

Terrorist attacks that continued in the following years demonstrated the elevated threat coming from countries beyond European borders, namely in Syria and Iraq (TESAT, 2016). Besides terrorist attacks perpetrated on European soil, the IS mastered recruitment and radicalisation strategies, which resulted in around 5 000 European citizens travelling to Syria and Iraq to join IS between 2011 and 2016 (Council of the European Union, n/d). Although foreign fighters initially managed to travel without consequences, as there was no legislation to stop this travel, the EU acted swiftly to address this issue, by passing legislation to criminalise travelling for the purpose of training and terrorism (Directive (EU) 2017/541, 2017). In addition, further action was taken beyond EU borders, mainly to identify recruitment and radicalisation networks as foreign fighters in third countries.

When the rubble cleared after the 2015 November attacks, then French President François Hollande took charge and met with several of his European counterparts in an effort to increase Europe's participation in the coalition against ISIS, led by the United States. The Global Coalition Against Daesh was established in 2014, and was composed of 86 partners, in an international effort to fight against this terrorist group and its territorial occupation in the Middle East (The Global Coalition Against Daesh, n/d). France's actions involved a wider spectrum of engagement; rather than focusing exclusively on the Islamic State in Syria, the strategy also included counter-terrorism operations in African countries, such as Mali and the Central African Republic. These actions followed the gradual distancing of the United States from the region starting in 2011, with France repositioning the Sahel and the Middle East as two of the most important areas for national security. As such, 2013 saw France deploy 3 000 soldiers to Mali and 1 600 troops to the Central African Republic to stop jihadist offensives in those countries (Sheffer, Michelot & Quencez, 2015). For the first time in history, the European Union's mutual defence clause was invoked. The response was positive as there was far-reaching solidarity towards France: while the United Kingdom began conducting airstrikes against IS, Germany rendered support in the shape of reconnaissance operations and logistical help (de Galbert, 2015).

Recognising the threat that international terrorism poses to Europe and other countries, the EU started investing in an integral approach through prevention and countering violent extremism programmes beyond its borders. In the last decade, the EU, through its Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace, has backed over 100 in-

itiatives implemented across the globe, with more than 75 partners and spending over EUR 407 million (Service for Foreign Policy Instruments, 2021). These encompass educational programmes, media capacity building, women's empowerment and youth engagement worldwide. The EU has been at the forefront of efforts to combat online extremist content, empower frontline individuals addressing radicalisation and track and curtail funding for terrorist organisations, among other actions.

On the diplomatic front, the terrorist attacks of 2015 also saw the European Union starting to engage with key players in the Middle East and North Africa – such as Saudi Arabia, Israel, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Lebanon and Algeria – in a more profound way. With lessons learned from its previous engagements in the Middle East, the Western response focused more on cooperation rather than a full military intervention on the ground, helping train and fund Peshmerga units (Kurdish military forces of the autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq) and other militias in the fight against the Islamic State. At the same time, France, on an individual level, increased its cooperation with the United States, coordinating airstrikes on Islamic State positions in Syria in 2015 and lending support to aerial operations by moving its aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle to the Persian Gulf to support the United States' operations against the Islamic State in the region.

Even after the Islamic State's caliphate fell into irrelevance, the question arose of what the European Union could do to address the continuous disruptive role of Syria in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Specialist researchers and analysts in the Middle East and North Africa, such as Levallois, Kasapoglu, Tur and Dalay (2023), defend engaging in a bold, multi-sectorial diplomatic approach via dialogue not only with the warring parties but also their backers such as Russia and Iran, using a key third party, Turkey, as a facilitator. Although there are other factors making this dialogue difficult, particularly the Russian invasion of Ukraine and Iran's role as a weapons supplier to Russia, the EU should consider the possibility of viewing these different conflicts as separate issues and working to diminish security concerns and threats bit by bit.

An additional issue that must be considered within the framework of European foreign policy and counter-terrorism concerns the high number of women and children still detained in detention camps in Syria and Iraq, even after the fall of the IS territorial occupation in 2019. However, the aftermath presents the international community with a host of intricate and challenging issues, particularly in addressing the status of numerous women and minors who were recruited or taken from various parts of the world (namely EU countries), or were born into the group. A study developed in July 2018 demonstrated that, excluding Syria and Iraq, women constituted approximately 13% (4 761) and minors comprised 12% (4 640) of the total 41 490 foreign individuals documented as having travelled to or been born within Islamic State territory across 80 countries (Cook & Vale, 2019). The lack of response, still today, to these numbers is worrisome and has implications for EU security.

For children born within the Islamic State, lacking proper documentation and facing

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legal statelessness can hinder access to immediate benefits and assistance within camps. Moreover, it may impede future actions, such as employment prospects and the attainment of permanent residency upon release. The predominant security-focused approach towards minors affiliated with the Islamic State has resulted in limited repatriation efforts at state level, leaving thousands in a state of uncertainty or subject to swift judicial processes. Delayed responses risk neglecting the well-being and developmental needs of minors. This delay may contribute to increased alienation and stigmatisation, potentially reinforcing their 'Islamic State affiliate' identity and fuelling grievances that may be exploited in the future by IS-like terrorist organisations (Cook & Vale, 2019). Additionally, the absence of deradicalisation and rehabilitative services during detention or post-release highlights persistent challenges in the long-term re-integration process —for both children and women. This lack of targeted intervention implies that women who continue to adhere to the ideology of the Islamic State may have the potential to radicalise others, including their children, or to strengthen their ties to this kind of extremist ideology (Cook & Vale, 2019).

Some European countries have taken the step and implemented efforts to bring women and children back to Europe, such as to France and the Netherlands. However, not all European countries have taken this decision, and the problem lingers. The lack of a concerted European strategy to deal with the issue of European women and children may bring future problems to the EU, namely terrorist attacks, and may hinder the efforts to prevent radicalisation to terrorism in third countries. The magnitude of the problem is such that some experts have compared detention camps in Syria to Guantanamo Bay prison and denounced it as a violation of international law (Schlein, 2023). And like Guantanamo, which has revealed the most egregious aspects of the Global War on Terror approach and served as a compelling recruitment tool for terrorists over the past two decades, the ongoing detention of women and children in the camps in Syria poses the potential to evolve into an enduring human rights crisis, a breeding ground for radicalisation to violence, and a representation of European hypocrisy and violence. This would then further fuel the emergence of the next generation of terrorism inspired by the Islamic State (Rights and Security International, 2021). As in the words of Richard Barrett, the former MI6 Director of Global Counter-Terrorism, 'The longer they stay without proper assessment of their mental and physical health or their attitudes towards their families, communities and countries – the more unpredictable they will become. And the more difficult it will be to determine what they're going to do' (Rights and Security International, 2021). Thus, it is of utmost importance to develop policies to support European women and children to return to their home countries, where they can be prosecuted, participate in deradicalisation programmes and, if successful, reintegrate back into society. If not possible to achieve a common approach between all EU countries, it would at least be desirable to implement humanitarian responses and deradicalisation programmes in the detention camps where these individuals are held, preventing their abandonment in a state of limbo without appropriate responses and relegation to the margins of society – these factors pose risks of radicalisation to violent extremism, as highlighted, and may constitute future challenges to European security, thereby presenting additional complexities for European foreign policy.

Chapter IV: The War in Ukraine

The Russian invasion of Ukraine saw, unexpectedly so, a unified Europe. Instead of fracturing, the Union immediately came together to support Ukraine by funding the government in Kyiv, supplying it with weapons and coordinating a series of sanctions targeting the Russian economy and sending it on a downwards spiral, thus devaluing the Russian ruble.

At the same time, while making it clear that the EU-NATO partnership would endure, the EU stood by its commitment to 'take more responsibility for its own security and defence' and increment its 'capacity to act autonomously', signalling a new approach to the role the Union should play in the international playground (Versailles Declaration, 2022). This also pointed out concrete measures to increase the Union's strategic independence, such as diminishing its energy dependence or increasing military mobility throughout the EU while also enhancing its own defence industry.

Furthermore, the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs suggested that the EU implement the Strategic Compass – a list of suggestions on how to strengthen the European Union's role in global geopolitics – and thus transition to a proper defence union as well, having its Ministers of Defence meet regularly and putting strategic autonomy at the core of its decision-making processes in terms of foreign and security policy (McAllister & Loiseau, 2022). It could be argued that the administration of US President Joe Biden was a catalyst for this change, as it placed emphasis on transatlantic cooperation, but that is one possibility that the Union cannot take for granted, especially considering the volatile political climate in the United States. Instead, it should use the momentum of Ukraine's defence to develop its own internal defence and security infrastructures so as to diminish the need to rely on the United States. It should also have the disposition to have its own bold foreign policy, with the ability to lead rather than just follow in America's footsteps.

The European Union, being aware of the need to rely on itself more than just depending on the United States , seems consistent in the way in which it has approached the situation in Ukraine. What was at first a multipolar competition over Ukraine is now a clear shift from previous Union approaches to similar situations (Kristi, 2023). In the past, the EU seemed to prefer to focus on soft power and dialogue over more decisive actions such as those taken to help defend Ukraine when faced with Russian aggression.

As of November 2023, the European Union imposed 11 restrictive measures, in the form of economic sanctions, that saw a ban on transactions with Russian key sectors such as the military, aviation, maritime and technological industries. Furthermore, European channels of transportation (not just roads but also airspace and seaports) were closed off to Russian transports. Over 240 Russian entities and 1 500 Russian individuals saw their assets frozen and banned from travel in Europe, and Russian media companies, such as Russia Today, were forbidden from broadcasting in Europe. Considering how dependent Europe is on Russian oil, that made for some difficulty in addressing the energy sector in terms of sanctions, but some measures were taken,

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such as prohibiting Russian coal imports and most crude oil products except crude oil delivered by pipeline.

Through the European Peace Facility, the European Union's off-budget fund dedicated to conflict prevention and the strengthening of international security, Ukraine has received EUR 3.1 billion to spend on weapons and other lethal equipment, EUR 2 billion for ammunition purchases and EUR 380 million for non-lethal supplies, such as clothing or body armour. On top of that, it is estimated that Ukraine has been given more than EUR 21 billion in bilateral military support (Archick, 2023).

Looking back, this shift presents itself as the logical evolution of what has happened since 2001: the Union has understood its value in tackling the root causes of insecurity abroad via dialogue and investment, has focused on governance building with the objective of forming resilient societies that respect human rights, but has also understood the need for decisive action and internal unity when faced with significant foreign threats to the stability it has worked so hard to achieve within the continent.

However, this shift in paradigm is yet to be tested. The war in Ukraine has exposed some of the EU's weaknesses and vulnerabilities, particularly because the EU's foreign, security and defence policies remain insufficient for handling conflicts. Additionally, the EU's defence structures are fragmented, lacking a unified and coherent policy to ensure its security amid the continent's instability. And the lack of a robust defence strategy represents a vulnerability. To overcome this, there is a need to strengthen Europe's position within NATO, preparing for a scenario where the United States may reduce its commitment to the military alliance (e.g. in case Trump wins the 2024 presidential elections).

Another vulnerability that this conflict has shown, which has not received sufficient attention from the European Union to date, pertains to the potential challenges arising from the involvement of foreign fighters in the conflict. In tandem with the previously mentioned influx of foreign fighters to Syria and Iraq to join the Islamic State, a parallel wave occurred between 2014 and 2021, directed towards eastern Ukraine. Approximately 17 000 individuals from abroad enlisted in the Russo-Ukrainian war, with an estimated 15 000 originating from Russia, while the remainder came from various other countries, with around one third hailing from European nations (Weijenberg & van Zuijdewijn, 2021). In contrast to the wave of foreign terrorist fighters, this particular surge occurred against the backdrop of the rise in right-wing extremism (Soufan Center, 2019). Academics raised concerns that individuals participating in this conflict were seeking military training and strengthening transnational extremist connections that could potentially culminate in terrorist attacks elsewhere. Despite the concerns surrounding this wave, and the noteworthy influx of foreign fighters converging on a conflict placed along one of the European borders, this surge did not attract significant European attention. Several factors may elucidate this, including the comparatively smaller size of this wave and its failure to translate into attacks in other European cities (Weijenberg & van Zuijdewijn, 2021).

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In the wake of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the concerns of a potential second wave of up to 20 000 foreign fighters, especially following the establishment of the International Legion for the Defence of Ukraine by the Ukrainian government to attract international fighters, were considerably exaggerated (Rekawek, 2023a). As of 2023, the estimated number of foreign fighters in Ukraine stands at around 2 000 (Makuch, 2023). Despite being lower in magnitude and perceived risk, the European Union has undervalued the potential dangers and challenges posed by these individuals. Policymakers within the EU should address concerns related to the identified threat of profiteers, organised crime, arms trafficking, radicalisation leading to extremism and human rights violations affecting local populations (Gibbons-Neff & Sheck, 2023). Conversely, upon their return to their home countries, including those within Europe, foreign fighters may necessitate assistance for successful reintegration into society, with particular regard to mental health issues stemming from their exposure to the inherent violence of a war context.

While two recent studies indicate that foreign fighters in the second wave exhibit apolitical tendencies with no apparent far-right elements (Rekawek, 2023b; Arutyunova & Bocchese, 2023), caution should be heeded due to the limited sample size. These findings should not be interpreted to mean there are no reasons for concern about their return. The lack of significant attachment to Ukrainian society among foreign fighters may contribute to human rights violations against local populations and exploiting the war for personal gain. Additionally, the potential for radicalisation persists, given the presence of Ukrainian domestic far-right movements and the likelihood of recruitment and the establishment of transnational ties. Therefore, the commitment to assisting Ukraine should be coupled with a broader European strategy to address and prevent future waves, akin to the approach taken with the wave of foreign fighters joining the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. However, despite the concerns mentioned, it is essential to avoid exaggerating the prevalence of far-right foreign fighters in Ukraine, as doing so may inadvertently support the Russian authorities' narrative, framing the invasion as a 'denazification' operation.

While the foreign fighters phenomenon may appear to be an internal and domestic issue, the truth is that it has several implications for EU security and this should be approached in the context of a foreign policy. This is, first, because foreign fighters joining the war in Ukraine not only come from European countries, but also from outside of Europe. Recent reports have shown that several individuals with past criminal activities have managed to come to Europe and circumvent the security assessment by Ukrainian authorities and, thus, joined the Ukrainian armed forces (Gibbons-Neff & Sheck, 2023). Secondly, access to weapons by foreign fighters with no formal attachment to a military army and with past criminal records, the potential to use these weapons in other conflicts or for criminal activities (such as in the case of the weapons used in the Bataclan terrorist attacks) are issues that the EU must be prepared to deal with. Third, there are foreign fighters that make a career out of foreign fighting, meaning that they join several foreign conflicts during their lifetime. Fourth, the potential to profit from conflicts can lead to greater human rights violations, causing more harm than good to local populations and even hindering war efforts. The war in Ukraine has also attracted the attention of mercenaries and the mobilisation of foreign fighters

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from countries such as Afghanistan and Syria to fight on the side of Russia, against European interests.

All of these reasons justify the need for common internal and external policies to deal with this phenomenon, which should be structured in two different phases. The first concerns prevention and to implement preventive efforts, cooperation with third countries is necessary in order to address root motivations and risk factors that may lead a person to leave their country of origin and fight for another country. The second concerns reintegration, where efforts to promote an effective return to society should be implemented. Some lessons from past deradicalisation programmes should be learned and applied. This is relevant not only to offer a path to a new life beyond the conflict, but also to prevent recidivism and other problems that may arise with the experience of war. Thus, common legislation at EU level and a shared and clear definition between concepts (foreign fighters vs mercenaries) is necessary.

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Chapter V: European Missions in Africa

Given the geographical proximity, it should not come as a surprise that Africa holds a significant number of European security missions. These engagements, both civilian and military, comprise peacekeeping operations but also efforts to promote peace talks and conflict mediation. In fact, under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the EU plays a leading role in global peacekeeping, conflict prevention and security strengthening, as an integral facet of the EU's comprehensive approach to crisis management. Since 2003, it has undertaken over 37 overseas operations across Europe, Africa and Asia, involving both civilian and military missions. Currently, there are 21 ongoing CSDP missions, with 12 civilian and 9 military missions (European External Action Service, n/d). Of these, 12 are based in Africa. Referring particularly to European Union Training Missions (EUTM), they are present in Somalia (since 2010), Mali (since 2013), the Central African Republic (since 2016) and Mozambique (since 2021). Given the presence of Wagner forces in the Central African Republic and Mali, the missions in these countries are suspended. The main goal is to implement a security sector reform that empowers and strengthens the military capabilities of EU partners, enabling them to uphold security within the framework of the rule of law. In line with this, the objective is to contribute to the security and peace of local communities, while building more resilient societies and providing humanitarian assistance (van der Lijn, 2022). These missions are particularly relevant in their contribution to the EU's counter-terrorism efforts, as the international terrorism hotspot is currently located in Africa, mainly in the Sub-Saharan region. As per assessments by counter-terrorism experts and reports, terrorism is gaining ground across the continent, fuelled by local, political and social factors. Organisations such as the Islamic State and other terrorist groups are capitalising on social grievances and exploiting porous borders (Associated Press, 2023). The insurgency in Cabo Delgado, northern Mozambique, serves as a glaring illustration of this trend, characterised by an unsupervised border with Tanzania, where some terrorist military camps are located, a sense of abandonment by governmental entities, manipulation of social grievances by imported extremist preachers and the region's wealth in fossil fuels (Cardoso, 2021; Bussotti & Coimbra, 2023). Given the significant presence of terrorism on the continent, there is an imperative for more robust and structural support from international actors, particularly as half of the world's victims of terrorism in 2022 hailed from African countries (Associated Press, 2023).

In addition, the Wagner presence in Africa has contributed to further destabilising some African countries and hindering European efforts. The Wagner Group constitutes an intricate network encompassing various businesses and mercenary groups, closely intertwined with the Russian military and intelligence community, and is often recognised due to its involvement in the war in Ukraine; however, its presence extends beyond Europe (Pereira, 2022). The Wagner Group's engagements have extended to numerous African nations, involving the provision of military and security support as part of an effort to extend the Kremlin's influence across the continent. In its operations, Wagner frequently offers security services and paramilitary aid, while initiating disinformation campaigns on behalf of embattled regimes (Rampe, 2023). These efforts are typically undertaken in exchange for resource concessions and diplomatic

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backing. The primary focal points of Wagner's activities in Africa include the Central African Republic, Libya, Mali and Sudan. The significance of these regions lies in their strained relationships with the West, owing to historical colonial legacies and inherent political disparities. These issues have been exploited and exacerbated by the disinformation campaigns and lack of effective efforts by the European Union within these countries. Notably, Wagner's involvement in African nations has been linked to alleged human rights violations, further contributing to the exacerbation of regional insecurity in certain instances (Rampe, 2023). On top of that, the last few years saw a series of coups in Africa. The Republic of Mali, the Republic of Guinea, Burkina Faso, the Republic of Sudan and the Gabonese Republic all had their governments toppled by their militaries, motivated not only by internal competition between different factions vying for power but also by external factors such as failing economies, security issues (particularly with the jihadist insurgencies mentioned), weakening global order and international geopolitical competition for influence, coming from countries like Russia and China. Given this context, the presence of security missions, with and in respect of the rule of law, is more important than ever.

The EUTM in Somalia (van der Ljin et al., 2022) is actively engaged in supporting the construction of a robust Somali National Army (SNA) to combat the Islamist group al-Shabaab. The overarching strategic objective of this mission is to enhance the proficiency, effectiveness, credibility and accountability of the Somali defence sector. This, in turn, facilitates a gradual transfer of security responsibilities to the Somali authorities. Initially, EUTM Somalia's mandate was primarily centred around delivering tactical training to individual recruits. Nevertheless, in 2013, the mission broadened its horizons, incorporating strategic advice and mentoring as essential facets of its responsibilities. EUTM Somalia has notably been instrumental in institution building, actively providing strategic guidance and fostering capacity building. This commitment extends to the advancement of pivotal entities, including, but not limited to, the Somali Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the SNA General Staff. Despite the relatively minor impact EUTM Somalia has had on the overall conflict dynamics within Somalia, the effects have been generally regarded as positive by those involved. Notably, the EU has enhanced its ability to monitor trainees upon the completion of their courses, leveraging coordination with the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) and other partner countries. Nevertheless, there remains a notable absence of specific mechanisms for ongoing tracking, advising, evaluating or monitoring of trainees postdeployment. One noteworthy facet of EUTM Somalia's influence lies in its indirect but positive impact on various humanitarian and rights-related aspects. The courses conducted by the mission have, for instance, played a role in enhancing the protection of civilians, improving the human rights environment and preventing instances of conflict-related sexual violence. This positive contribution stems from the incorporation of comprehensive training in international humanitarian law, human rights law and strategies for preventing sexual violence into the curriculum for SNA trainees.

The EUTM Mali (van der Ljin et al., 2022) is strategically oriented towards revitalising the military capabilities of the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa), aiming to enhance their operational effectiveness in territorial defence and counter-terrorism efforts. Originally centred on technical and tactical training, capacity building and advisory

services on doctrine, human resource management, information systems and intelligence for the FAMa, the mission has taken a multifaceted approach. The objective encompasses 'train the trainers' courses and capacity-building initiatives, with the overarching goal of establishing a sustainable, locally driven training programme. The 2015 Bamako Agreement added training sessions for reintegrated members of signatory armed groups, broadening the mission's scope. However, the security situation in Mali witnessed a significant deterioration in August 2020, resulting in a military coup d'état due to growing opposition to the civilian regime. This event highlighted the country's vulnerability to military governance roles and posed new challenges for EUTM Mali. Besides, the mission faced substantial obstacles that complicated the mission's mandate, including insufficient political will within the Malian government to establish comprehensive political and institutional reforms, particularly in the defence and security sectors, as well as to combat corruption. While training has been positively assessed, contributing to improved FAMa readiness against armed groups, setbacks occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent coups in 2020 and 2021. Despite these challenges, EUTM Mali succeeded in training soldiers and establishing favourable relationships with the FAMa and the Ministry of Defence (MOD), at least until the 2021 coup. Following this event, relations were strained between the transitional Malian government, France and several European countries, primarily due to concerns about the Wagner Group's presence. The inability to guarantee the separation of EUTM Mali trainees from Wagner Group staff necessitated the resizing of the mission and the suspension of training activities.

The EUTM in the Central African Republic (CAR) (van der Ljin et al., 2022) actively supports the restoration of the CAR Armed Forces (FACA). This effort occurs amidst persistent instability due to the presence of the Séléka alliance and anti-balaka self-defence groups. The primary mission focuses on facilitating Defence Sector Reform (DSR) to shape a modern, effective and democratically accountable FACA. EUTM CAR provides strategic advice on DSR and initiates educational programmes for FACA's officers and specialists. One key strategy involves implementing the 'train the trainers' concept to enhance FACA's internal capacity for education and training system development. The mission received positive evaluations for its impact on military capacity building, benefiting over 7 000 FACA personnel through training and education. Many of these individuals have subsequently been deployed to actively contribute to the country's stabilisation efforts. Additionally, the mission successfully assisted the Ministry of Defence (MOD) in re-establishing a human resources system and streamlining the retirement process. Despite these achievements, the lack of comprehensive monitoring systems poses challenges in objectively measuring the mission's impact on human rights and other areas, and much work remains in progress. FACA is yet to evolve into inclusive, effective, well-functioning and democratically accountable armed forces, particularly when addressing security challenges beyond the capital city of Bangui, without the support of the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the CAR (MINUSCA). Concerns have arisen regarding potential threats to stability posed by FACA, including the risk of a military coup d'état. In November 2021, reports disclosed that multiple FACA units, including at least one battalion trained by the EU, were operating directly under the command or supervision of the Wagner Group. Consequently, the EU Political and Security Committee decided to suspend

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EUTM CAR's training and education activities.

The EUTM in Mozambique was launched in October 2021 as a component of the European Union's comprehensive response to the Government of Mozambique's request for assistance in addressing the crisis in Cabo Delgado, which has faced terrorist attacks since 2017 (European External Action Services, n/d). This response encompasses political dialogue, humanitarian aid, peacebuilding, security and development. EUTM Mozambique is committed to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of the Mozambican armed forces' response to the Cabo Delgado crisis while adhering to human rights law and international humanitarian law.

The primary strategic goal of EUTM Mozambique is to facilitate the capacity building of selected units within the Mozambican armed forces, designated to form a future Quick Reaction Force (QRF). This capacity-building initiative aims to equip these units with the necessary and sustainable capabilities to restore safety and security in Cabo Delgado. It is crucial to note that EUTM Mozambique operates with a non-executive mandate and does not participate in combat operations. Additionally, the EUTM operates within the capital city, which is far away from the conflict zone. This is considered one of the disadvantages of this mission, as it is not possible to know its real impact in Cabo Delgado. Moreover, as the mission mandate is still at an early stage of implementation and its assessment yet to be made, little is known about the evaluation and impact of the activities.

Looking at the cases presented, the European Union's missions have had a marginal beneficial impact on their African partners in terms of technical abilities, but did not manage to have a similar positive impact on the matters of human rights and civil liberties. In Somalia, the European mission met with considerable success in forging ties with the government and the African Union. Through military capacity building, the EU mission managed to prepare the Somali military for good performances in offensive movements and the stabilisation work that follows – as evidenced during Operation Badbaboo, when the Somali armed forces engaged al-Shabaab and took back rural areas south of Mogadishu (Williams & Ali, 2020). In Mali, the armed forces showed an improvement in combat capabilities, being able to effectively repel advances made by rebel groups, after eight years of training under European instructors.

The main success, apart from the number of Malian troops trained, was the dialogue established with the military leadership. However, Mali still presents cases of human rights violations and there is the need for political desire to enforce structural and institutional changes to make sure this mission is a success overall. The best way to do this would be to keep including Malian authorities, particularly military ones, in the design and planning stages of the European Union's objectives for the mission, adding the value of Malian know-how as opposed to focusing solely on what European knowledge can do for Mali. As previously indicated, it is important to establish follow-up mechanisms to ensure that the trainees apply the lessons learned in the European Union's mission and respect human rights when deployed. While the training has, on the one hand, improved combat capabilities, European instructors need to improve cooperation with their Malian counterparts, in an environment that saw the

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mission's objectives hindered by the worsening security situation both in Mali and in its border regions. In the Central African Republic (CAR), the European mission was met with similar results. It managed to train an estimated 7 000 soldiers and bettered the retirement processes of officers. On the other hand, it also saw a suspension of European training and the return of the mission's 70 officers to Europe. This was due to the Wagner Group's influence in CAR armed forces' leadership, which became too much to ignore. In addition to the role the Wagner Group played in the political situation, the European mission was plagued by a myriad of issues, in particular, those of communication, as the CAR military leadership preferred to have ad hoc operations rather than engaging in training under the European mission's structure. This is on top of the limitations faced by the European mission, unable to provide gear and weaponry to CAR units that Russian proxy forces began to supply (Hickendorff & Acko, 2021).

In terms of overall limitations, the Swedish International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) analysis has summarised several disadvantages that apply to the generality of EU's missions described in this chapter. First, the lack of desire to outfit African regimes with deadly weapons to counter terrorist insurgency on their own. Second, the lack of a follow-up for the trained personnel, which leaves the European missions without any assessment of their results. Third, the inability to train soldiers on the ground, where terrorism or other insurgencies are occurring. Fourth, communication issues related to language and high turnover rates, meaning there are no institutional capacities being built to attract and keep personnel interested and invested in the missions. Other issues such as EU missions being focused on capital cities (away from fringe conflict zones) and the limited application of a joint method of acting with military support and developmental aid going hand in hand also restricted the missions' ability to make demands on human rights or civil liberties (van der Ljin, 2022). An additional problem relates to the emphasis that the EU puts on respect for human rights and international law. As Peter Stano, the EU's leading spokesperson for foreign affairs, said, although the Union wants to scale its operations in an effort to 'reinforce African solutions to African problems' (Brzozowski, 2022), the truth is that EU support comes with strings attached, with demands on human rights and civil liberties from the African host countries, which are not made by other powers engaged in the region, such as Russia or China. Thus, overall, the results of the EU's training missions have been two-fold: on the one hand, there has been a clear betterment of African armed forces in tactical terms, improving their combat effectiveness; on the other hand, the efforts made by the EU forces to increase accountability and good governance in the security sector have not been successful.

The political instability in Africa, along with hostility to European presence (towards European powers as a whole but focused in France in particular, in retaliation to the racism and violations committed during the colonial days) is a serious issue for the European Union. The hostility manifested towards European troops, mainly the French, must be addressed with multi-level and multi-sectorial interventions. Two fundamental principles on which these interventions could be based are the recognition of past atrocities and building synergies capable of fostering a more positive and mutual beneficial relationship between the EU and African countries. Furthermore, it

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has become clear that some of the issues Europe faces can only be resolved with a more resilient, stronger Africa. This means having more stable governments capable of dealing more successfully with security threats and cooperating with the EU on international security issues. The main interlocutors on the ground, such as the African Union, have issues of their own that limit their effectiveness, and other powers, particularly Russia and China, offer more attractive prospects than the European Union, not attaching any conditions to their aid. Russia, in particular, has no qualms about offering armaments or even deploying its own proxy operatives, such as the Wagner Group, to African countries. The promises of Chinese development aid and Russian military support are very appealing to African leaders, who find these two partners easier to work with than the European Union, whose aid is often associated with issues such as compliance with human rights or civil liberties.

These identified obstacles do not mean that there is no room for the EU to operate in Africa; rather, the EU has to reassess the way it operates to promote a more meaningful, equal partnership. The main complaint of African partners on the ground is that the European Union's missions promote a very 'Eurocentric' approach to problems that are rooted in African issues. Therefore, it is fundamental to promote a horizontal partnership with Africa, actively including the region's perspective and advice in Europe's own action plans for the area (Ferreira & Oliveira, 2021). The European Union also needs to evaluate where it currently focuses its action and, instead of supporting countries that are in a good economic situation, should concentrate its efforts in fragile countries and the emphasis be put on human development as well, in particular, helping minority groups such as women and youth, meeting Africa's needs in areas such as education, employment and health (which are some of the risk factors of terrorism). It is also important that the Union's support to Africa is not bound too heavily by demands with regards to migration or security policies. The Union should focus on the partner country's priorities and not bind the delivery of development aid to conditions that may risk the relationship. Instead, the relationship between the European Union and Africa should also be focused on reciprocity, offering the same benefits it receives. One glaring case would be the inclusion of the African Union in the European Peace Facility, considering that the European Union has a seat in the African Union's Peace Fund. Furthermore, it is essential to implement integral and community-based approaches, which must be rigorously assessed to understand what worked and why, in order to improve missions and apply it in other future interventions.

Given the instability in some African nations, the surge of terrorism and the takeover of parcels of territory by terrorist organisation, coupled with the influence of external actors that have the capacity to damage Europe's image and efforts, it is necessary to pay further attention to this continent. In the words of Peter Knoope, former director of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 'the West tends to focus on Ukraine and not zoom out to the bigger picture. That has been a weakness for a long time' (Deus Pereira, 2022). If sufficient care and effort are not directed towards this continent, the EU may have lost its opportunity to act with intention and leverage.

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Chapter VI: The Mediterranean Border

Migration has become an increasingly contentious issue, perceived more as a problem and challenge than an opportunity. Following the events of 9/11 and subsequent terrorist attacks in Europe, migration has been viewed through a security lens, aiming to prevent potential threats in the EU. The substantial influx of refugees in 2015 heightened perceived threats, leading to the adoption of more restrictive and controversial measures, particularly the deal with Turkey. From a broader perspective, the figures for individuals entering Europe via the Central Mediterranean or Western Balkan routes saw a resurgence in 2022. Frontex data reveals a significant increase of 51% and 136% on these routes, resulting in a total of 330 000 irregular entries last year. While 2023 is ongoing, the numbers are already higher, and as the European elections in 2024 approach, this issue is poised to take centre stage in discussions. Several countries are increasingly advocating for more restrictive measures to control European borders. However, measures to control European borders are nothing new.

The conflict in Libya contributes a great deal to the instability in the Mediterranean Sea, with smugglers exploiting the conflict and using the Mediterranean crossing to profit from it. The European Union has been operating in the Mediterranean since 2015, first under the name of Operation Sophia and, when this ended, under the guise of Operation Irini, both officially known as European Union Naval Force Mediterranean Operation (EUNAVFOR MED). Sophia's objective was to capture and dispose of vessels used by people smugglers and prevent the loss of migrant lives during the crossing. Initially created as an operation to identify and board boats suspected of human trafficking, in 2017, Operation Sophia gained new orders to train Libyan Coast Guard and Navy personnel and to help implement the United Nations' embargo on weapons off the coast of Libya.

In March 2020, with the end of Operation Sophia, Operation Irini commenced, with the goal of controlling the flow of weapons into Libya and stopping illegal oil exports. Irini's area of operation was not in waters used by human smugglers, which meant the likelihood of its ships having to rescue migrants under distress was smaller. This was decided as the only way to get all of the Union's members on board and supporting the operation, as some countries, such as the UK or Hungary, saw rescues made by the Union's forces (an obligation under international law) as a 'pull factor', encouraging more migrant flows towards Europe. The numbers show that 2020 only saw 35 673 irregular crossings of the Central Mediterranean, whereas those in 2016 had reached up to 181 459, the largest number ever recorded (Number of illegal crossings of the Central Mediterranean route to the EU 2009-2022, Olan McEvoy, 2023).

In October 2023 the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, upheld that Operation Irini should return to its predecessor's priorities and change its focus from enforcing the UN's arms embargo on Libya to fighting organised crime and human smuggling. Von der Leyen has also defended the EU's deals with North African countries,e.g. with Tunisia which granted EUR 785 million of government support in exchange for Tunisia controlling migrant departures towards Europe (Euractiv, 2023). This shows some indecision on the Union's side, switching Operation Irini's

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goals from arms control to migrant control, emulating Operation Sophia's priorities, due in large part to internal dissent between Member States. Italy, one of Sophia's earliest supporters in 2015, also vetoed the very same operation in 2019. In fact, the divide on Operation Sophia was such that in its final stages the European Council voted to continue the operation while also stripping it of its naval contingent at the same time (European Council conclusions, 2017).

The way both operations were designed and handled is open to debate. Operation Sophia was inspired by Italy's Operation Mare Nostrum, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency's (Frontex) own Operation Triton and other previous military actions designed to fight piracy, such as Operation Atalanta in Somalia. Instead of coming up with a new plan of action, the European Union decided to adapt a template it was familiar with and knew could be implemented in a short timeframe. This is a good example of the European Union's mostly reactive approach to security challenges and how it handles them: by copying tried-and-true methods of action to be applied as soon as possible, instead of taking the time to create tailor-made responses (Bosilca, 2020). With a cost of EUR 9 million per month for a 12-month-long deployment, with EUR 1.8 million from the External Borders Fund allocated to it, and operating near Libya's coast, Operation Mare Nostrum was heavily criticised. Critics argued that – in rescuing and bringing to Europe migrants – it was encouraging more Mediterranean crossings and arrivals of migrants. In response to these critics, Frontex launched Operation Triton, which was a scaled-down Mare Nostrum, acting near the Italian coast and focussing on border protection rather than search and rescue operations. The costs were also significantly lower, reportedly costing EUR 3 million per month, as opposed to Mare Nostrum's EUR 9 million. However, operation Mare Nostrum saved around 150 000 lives a year, with the International Organization for Migration Director General William Lacy Swing viewing it as a humanitarian mission: 'This is not a crisis of a so-called "excess" of migrants overburdening the continent, but an emergency of more people needing protection, aid and safe migration channels, especially for those not covered by existing protection systems' (International Organization for Migration, 2014).

Sophia and Irini were also met with criticism. The House of Lords of the UK argued that the operation 'responds to symptoms, not causes' of the irregular migrant flow in the Mediterranean (House of the Lords of the UK Parliament, 2016). Although the UK Parliament agreed that it was fundamental to have search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean, it also defended the fact that the mission would encourage irregular migration rather than acting as a deterrent, with migrants believing that they would be rescued by European vessels and then be integrated into European society. On the other hand, the support given to the Libyan Coast Guard has also been criticised on the grounds that Libyan authorities have committed several human rights violations when intercepting migrants at sea. Politically speaking, there has also been backlash against the operation from the parties involved in the Libyan civil war. The UN-backed Government of National Accord was opposed to Operation Irini on the basis that it would compromise the supply of weapons received from Turkey. Turkey has also stated that Operation Irini benefits Khalifa Haftar, a warlord and one of the main warring parties in the Libyan civil war.

European countries at the forefront of the migrant crisis, such as Italy or Malta, have complained about the unfairness of the distribution methods for rescued migrants, and argue that they are forced to cooperate with Libya's Coast Guard. Despite its lack of influence in Union-wide foreign policy (as foreign policy is decided by the Council of the EU, which requires an agreement between all Member States before a resolution is passed), the European Parliament made formal inquiries into the matter, pointing out that the Libyan Coast Guard has a poor history of sea rescue capabilities on top of several accusations of human rights violations (Global Legal Action Network, 2022). Several Member States also took unilateral action against non-governmental organisations such as Sea Watch. Italy's prime location along the routes used by migrants and smugglers meant that it was also one of the first countries to act against non-governmental organisations by closing ports to their ships or, through its strong anti-mafia laws, equating search and rescue operations with human smuggling. Greece followed suit, enacting a registry of organisations dedicated to saving migrants at sea and closing its own ports to ships carrying migrants as well. Malta seized humanitarian ships and ignored distress calls and requests to unload migrants at its ports. Even countries not at the forefront of the migrant routes have enacted measures to limit the operation of NGOs, such as the Netherlands using bureaucratic measures relating to boat inspections to ground Sea Watch 3, a boat used by Sea Watch in search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean that flew the Dutch flag. Germany has also followed along the same lines, introducing new requirements for boats involved in search and rescue operations, applying large fines and even impounding the vessels that did not comply.

The EU's operations in the Mediterranean showed several areas where joint action is needed but lacking. More than just patrolling the Mediterranean, the European Union has to work in tandem with other partners in the region to control migrant flows and also act directly within the countries the migrants come from. There was no standard practice in migrant distribution when it came to offering asylum and the material conditions in host countries surrounding said asylum. The focus on containing migrant movement towards Europe also meant the mismanagement of funds initially intended for development aid. In countries such as Turkey or Libya, these funds were diverted to actions such as outfitting coast guard units, effectively not addressing the root causes of said migrant movements and with the added negative outcome of these same units often facing accusations of human rights violations when dealing with migrants. Furthermore, the Union is divided, with the Council of the EU usually ignoring requests to stop the return of captured migrants to Libya, whereas the European Parliament, particularly through its committees, tries to promote a more humane approach to the subject, asking for an end to the cooperation between European agencies and the Libyan Coast Guard, for example (Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2021). However, the humanitarian impact of these missions ought to be recognised.

Since their implementation, the number of recorded deaths in the Mediterranean dropped considerably and in a consistent manner between 2016 and 2020, from 5 136 deaths to 1 449. It comes as no surprise that, with the rise in deaths between 2020 and 2022, from 1 449 deaths to 2 367, the European Union is considering changing Irini's mandate to include search and rescue operations along with its original priority

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of controlling the flow of weapons into Libya (Deaths of migrants in the Mediterranean Sea 2014-2022, Statista Research Department).

Several improvements were suggested to the European Parliament and Council of the EU to better its approach to this key issue. It was pointed out that there is a need to develop a framework so that the implementation of measures to deal with migrant flows in the Mediterranean is common to all Member States and based on the Union's values, particularly regarding human rights. Some proposed measures were the periodic evaluation by independent bodies with the responsibility of assessing how EU law compliance has been guaranteed and with the power to create recommendations for improvement on EU actions; European Parliament's control of follow-up systems, where the results of the evaluations and recommendations are incorporated into the relevant agreements or funding and changes to current ways of acting are introduced as necessary; and, most importantly, the European Parliament challenging the legality of any measures that fail to observe fundamental rights (Directorate-General for Internal Policies, 2021). Additionally, the European Union has also implemented ad hoc measures to try to stop migration coming to Europe. Recently, as mentioned, EU leaders reached an agreement with Tunisia, which was criticised for several reasons. One of them concerns the fact that the EU was reacting, instead of acting with a structured plan. This comes at a difficult time, as EU leaders are preparing for the 2024 elections and migration is at the centre of discussion, largely due to the rise of populist movements, who discuss migration only as a security and threat issue.

The illicit transportation of migrants across international borders, via land, air and sea routes, remains a persistent challenge that hampers effective migration governance and disrupts the facilitation of safe and orderly migration. Migrant smuggling constitutes a criminal offence in the domestic legal frameworks of numerous states, and is also recognised as such under international law. Given the limited accessibility of regular migration pathways for many migrants, including refugees, smugglers are adept at exploiting this situation for financial gain. Thus, implementing measures to work on this more effectively is crucial. Part of this could be a long-term and structured plan devised with countries of origin and transit. Working in close cooperation with these partners to address the root causes of migration (security, economic, political, environmental challenges), establish services and contact points for access to regular migration paths, improve living and security conditions within these countries and effectively combat and punish smugglers should all be incorporated in a European common foreign policy strategy. It is not easy, nor is it a quick task, but the EU has the instruments to invest in this. Viewing countries of origin of migration as partners, with a win-win situation for all, should be the motto (Directorate-General for Internal Policies).

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Chapter VII: Disinformation as a Challenge to the EU's Foreign Policy

The erosion of information integrity by means of disinformation is not a new phenomenon. However, in recent years, some experts argue that the world is living in a 'fake news era', with the increased internet use and foreign interference in politics impacting on democratic institutions and civic life (Rügenhagen, Beck & Sartorius, 2020). To better understand the impact of this threat, it is important to understand the underlying concepts. As such, information integrity can be defined as accurate, consistent and reliable information (IFLA, 2023), which may be threatened by the use of disinformation (inaccurate or false information spread with the intention to cause harm), misinformation (inaccurate or false information disseminated with no intention) and malinformation (true information disseminated without context with the intention to cause disruption) – hereafter referred to in this report as MDM. The impact of the erosion of information integrity may be greater than expected. One growing body of evidence suggests that such erosion poses a threat to the development and sustenance of well-governed and peaceful societies. The deleterious effects of information integrity erosion are evident in its capacity to undermine the social contract, corrode trust in democratic processes and institutions and contribute to resistance against public policy initiatives. All of this precipitates democratic regression, human rights infringements as well as social and political polarisation. While the internet has opened up avenues for increased information accessibility, the rapid and extensive dissemination of fake and inaccurate information outpaces that of information from reliable and credible sources. This, in turn, impairs the public's capacity to make well-informed decisions, actively engage in democratic processes and contribute to the establishment of inclusive, peaceful and just societies.

Given the threat posed by MDM, the number of European citizens aged 16-74 who verify information online is still relatively low. In a Eurostat survey conducted in 2021, nearly half (47%) of individuals in the EU aged 16-74 encountered false or questionable information on news websites or social media. Surprisingly, the EU average of individuals who took measures to verify the accuracy of the information or content is 23% (Eurostat, 2021). With increased polarisation in society and international conflicts that further fuel this polarisation, the ability to verify, detect and avoid the dissemination of false information is crucial to diminish the impact of MDM.

However, although public awareness is growing, eradicating MDM is an impossible task. This is a global phenomenon, with global consequences, such as interference in democratic processes. With this in mind, the EU is implementing measures to tackle it. The Action Plan against Disinformation comprises four measures designed to enhance capacity and strengthen the responses of EU Member States (European Union External Action, 2018). These measures include raising awareness and enhancing social resilience, mobilising the private sector for collaborative efforts against disinformation, fostering improved cooperation and joint initiatives and, ultimately, enhancing the detection, analysis and exposure of disinformation.

Although these steps may seem focused on domestic policy, they are strategically positioned within a broader context to address a global phenomenon and counter

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foreign interference. In this particular field – fighting foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) – the EU has been taking considerable steps following the initial attempts to undermine democratic processes in European politics (European Union External Action, 2021). For instance, in May 2017, just before the final round of the French presidential elections, hacked data from Emmanuel Macron's campaign team was released online. Despite earlier disinformation efforts against Macron's campaign, the 'Macron Leaks' episode, comprising genuine emails and forgeries, stands out as a failed attempt by Russia to interfere in the election and sow division in French society. However, not all disinformation campaigns have failed.

In the context of international relations, MDM and disinformation, in particular, have gained prominence, with countries such as Russia and China playing a significant role in spreading false information, with the intention to interfere in European domestic and foreign policy. In a previous chapter of this report, the role of the Wagner Group in Africa was discussed as a foreign policy branch of the Kremlin's strategy to leverage Russian influence in African countries. However, for Russia, this is not enough. Active and intentional disinformation campaigns have been engineered to spread division and exploit frustration and resentment towards Western countries, namely European countries with a colonial past (Keaten, Mednick & Anna, 2023).

On this topic, Russia has been at the forefront of disinformation efforts in Africa and in 2022, only 16 campaigns were detected (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022). These campaigns, rooted in a legacy dating back to Joseph Stalin, employ tactics derived from the Russian military strategy of 'ambiguous warfare'. By amplifying grievances and exploiting divisions within targeted societies, the strategy aims to foster fragmentation and inaction, all while maintaining plausible deniability. The primary objective is not necessarily to persuade but to confuse citizens, creating false equivalences between democratic and non-democratic actors, leading to disillusionment and apathy. Yevgeny Prigozhin, the former leader of the Wagner Group, has exported disinformation campaigns to African countries where Wagner operates. These campaigns, while promoting a favoured regime and Russia's role on the continent, convey anti-democratic, anti-West and anti-UN messages.

Similarly, another country that has been using disinformation campaigns in Africa is China. Chinese disinformation practices in Africa, labelled as propaganda campaigns by the Chinese government, have taken an institutionalised approach. This approach involves total state control of information, treating it as capital to be exploited rather than a public good grounded in journalistic standards. As such, China exports its media practices to Africa through various channels, including training African journalists in Chinese programmes that discourage the criticism of African leaders and Chinese officials. Additionally, China purchases ownership shares in African media houses, steering editorial practices towards the Chinese model. The sale of Chinese technology to Africa is another avenue, enabling governments to exert greater control over digital information, including site blocking and internet shutdowns (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2023). Like Russia, Chinese disinformation campaigns aim at leveraging Chinese influence and diminishing and targeting Western and European foreign policy in these countries. However, Chinese disinformation campaigns extend to other

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regions, namely Europe and European interests. These disinformation campaigns appear to be intensifying a long-term strategy that extends beyond promoting pro-Chinese messages. The focus is on amplifying discord related to crucial political and social issues, as well as tarnishing the reputations of activists, journalists, policymakers and democratic governments (Cook, 2023). As a result, in 2023 the EU has launched a platform to fight Russian and Chinese disinformation. A newly established Information Sharing and Analysis Centre within the EU's foreign services, the European External Action Service (EEAS), aims to monitor and counter information manipulation by foreign actors. This centre will facilitate coordination among the 27 EU countries and engage with the broader community of NGOs in addressing this challenge.

In an era dominated by fake news facilitated by social media, the challenges of information integrity and MDM campaigns extend beyond domestic politics to affect European foreign policies. Foreign countries with intention to cause harm and disruption pose a significant threat. Consequently, MDM, particularly foreign influence and manipulation of information (FIMI), should be a key focus in the development of a robust and resilient European foreign policy. As elaborated in Chapter 5 concerning European missions in Africa, the EU has already encountered the negative impacts of foreign interference and disinformation. It is imperative for the EU to recognise and address this threat without underestimation, swiftly applying the lessons learned and employing multisectoral cooperation with third countries.

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Conclusion

Since 2003, the European Union has been developing its own approach to security and foreign relations. Starting in Europe itself, the Balkans, and then expanding to Africa and the Middle East, the EU has tried to advance its own interests via peacekeeping and conflict prevention using a mix of civilian and military agents, developing a 'carrot and stick' strategy, first helping with financial incentives like development aid and diplomatic efforts and then via kinetic action and tactical support such as in military operations, in an effort to respond to crises that may affect Europe.

The priority for Europe lies in maintaining a common foreign and defence policy that is coherent and can yield positive results in accordance with its stated goals of promoting the United Nations Charter, while also ensuring the continent's security. As such, Africa is the most obvious choice for Europe to advance towards that objective, given its location, being a fertile ground for Chinese and Russian activities and its stability being directly associated with the European Union's own stability. As seen in previous chapters, Africa is a priority when it comes to European foreign and security policies. It was widely seen how the migrant crisis has allowed populist forces to question the need and usefulness of the European Union. However, Europe´s role in the region is being challenged by Chinese and Russian incursions, leaving the Union with no choice but to take a more decisive approach in Africa.

France, arguably the biggest active European player in Africa in terms of military deployment, has been consistently losing influence. Starting in 2020, coups in French-speaking African countries – such as Burkina Faso, Guinea and Niger – put in place new leaders that openly wanted to change their countries' allegiance towards Russia and away from their former coloniser. This poses a serious challenge to the EU's role in the region considering most actions within the continent, particularly in the defence sector, are led by France, with the rest of the EU forces as subordinates (Rieker, 2022). To reinforce its presence in Africa, the European Union should focus on the development of resilient institutions and systems of governance, encourage the creation of civil society organisations that serve as watchdogs over their governments and demand democratic accountability. At the same time, the European Union should closely coordinate with its equivalent regional entity, the African Union, and with the several existing regional blocs in Africa and help them with capacity building and internal reforms. Furthermore, it is also important to help diminish regional asymmetries that make African cooperation a harder dream to achieve.

Internally, the European Union should let member countries with solid experience in Africa take charge, namely Portugal and Spain. Both Iberian countries could function as brokers in the region and have wide-ranging experience, at bilateral level, working with African countries in the fields of defence cooperation and capacity building, through training, sourcing material and helping with security issues. Taking advantage of the membership overlap, it also makes sense for the EU to work closely with NATO in Africa. This EU-NATO coalition ought to cooperate with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), providing much-needed financial aid and military know-how. It is only through a multi-level and more horizontal

approach that the European Union can regain influence lost to China and Russia in this vital region of the world which will ultimately for the sake of Europe's own interests and security.

Looking at the bigger picture, it is clear that the main threat to security, be it organised crime or terrorism, has become an international and cross-border phenomena and that it is only through a combination of a Union-level policy of diplomatic relations based on cooperation (with a clear focus on capacity building and the promotion of democracy, the United Nations Charter and human rights) and boots on the ground to help local forces deal with insurgency and extremist movements that the European Union can truly be a significant player. Security goes hand in hand with foreign policy, so it is important to consider them as a single pathway to achieving the desired outcomes of stability and peace, rather than two separate routes.

Africa, as a region, holds the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing irregular migration. A comprehensive, long-term strategy for migration collaboration involves working with countries of origin to establish regulated migration channels, enhancing living conditions while respecting human rights and international law, contributing to economic improvement and reinforcing the rule of law to combat organised crime and migrant smuggling. By implementing such multi-faceted initiatives, the EU can establish mutually beneficial solutions for both regions. This approach not only aids in reducing the number of deaths in the Mediterranean but also mitigates the influence of populist movements in Europe. Most importantly, it focuses on enhancing the living conditions of migrants who choose Europe as their destination.

A final consideration pertains to disinformation. Although misinformation is not a recent occurrence, the rise of social media and increased global disorder has turned Africa into a testing ground. The level of foreign interference in African nations, aiming not only to manipulate domestic politics but also to counter Western, and European, influence and interests, has escalated. Consequently, it is imperative for European authorities to take proactive measures and glean valuable insights from experiences on the ground.

Europe still has a long way to go to be in a solid position to fight the aforementioned threats on its own. However, the prospects for a cohesive European approach towards security challenges are positive, especially considering how security has morphed the Union's view of its foreign policy. Deepening intelligence sharing (the great ultimate taboo, seen as a significant loss of national sovereignty) and changing the long-held view that security issues are to be dealt with at national level are some of the challenges that the EU must face to strengthen its approach towards security challenges. Despite those issues, the European Union's attempts to tackle its security and defence matters have brought the various Member States closer together and generally promoted cooperation and mutually beneficial partnerships abroad. There are also some issues to face within the European Union, namely its functioning. In an age where decisive action is needed to face new geopolitical challenges in a constantly changing landscape, the European Union is too often slowed down by its own bureaucracy. Changing the way the Council of the European Union works is fundamental, en-

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suring that a qualified majority is enough to pass votes related to foreign and security policy and taking away veto powers. This would make for a fit-for-purpose European Union, acting swiftly in the promotion of both of its strategic interests and its values: freedom and human rights.

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