

Speaker: Matteo Arisci, EEAS
Moderator: Victor Aguilar, DG EAC
Rapporteur: Zinaida de Boon, DG EAC

Report Thematic Session 3: Europe in the World

The moderator welcomed all trainees and introduced the speaker, Mr. Arisci, a former Blue Book Trainee, currently working as Information and Communication Officer at the European External Action Service.

In his presentation, Mr. Arisci addressed the role of Europe in the world by focusing mainly on foreign policy and security issues and the diplomatic role of the EU. He started with a reference to the Iran nuclear deal framework, as one of the most important deals of our time. The agreement, reached in 2015 between Iran and a group of world powers (the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council—the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, France, and China—plus Germany) and the European Union, would not have happened without the EU and is an example for the world, demonstrating that diplomacy works. It also showed that the EU is able to bring different actors together. Throughout the years, the EU always kept the doors open for talks and the negotiation table ready for diplomatic negotiations. By doing so, the EU has gained a so called 'convening power', the credibility to bring people on board. This is partially possible due to the alignment of the EU with the US, although the international fora are complicated and always changing; sometimes the two are on the same side but this is not naturally always the case.

The international realities can change rapidly as many different processes and institutions are involved. At the same time, we should not forget that EU foreign policy turned into an institute only very recently and it will take time and effort for EU foreign policy to mature. Our time is marked by the large amount of challenges taking place at the same time, ranging from terrorist attacks to crisis in various regions (e.g. Ukraine, and Syria where a geopolitical war is developing), affecting the EU and/or its borders due to the migration flows. In such a world, diplomacy is moving really fast and the EU cannot reach diplomatic solutions on its own. The Iran deal was only made possible because Russia was involved and Russia is also needed to solve the conflict in Syria.

On the security and defence side, we also see fast developments. Since the UK is leaving the EU there is a bigger need for cooperation. The changes in the US administration also show that the EU should not count on being automatically secured by these big powers in the future. The EU is, therefore, increasing its cooperation with NATO but also with EU member states. With PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation), the EU aims to unify the different defence systems of its member states where possible and increase the cooperation between them.

Operation Sophia was implemented to defend the European Mediterranean borders, to limit the amount of people crossing these borders illegally and to break the business model of the smugglers. It successfully improved the level of security in the Mediterranean as the number of deaths went down. At the same time, the operation did not solve the problem completely as the crisis moved to Libya. To solve the migration problems, the EU is looking in the region if and how economic migrants can be motivated to move back to their home countries voluntarily but is also creating new partnerships with various countries as the Sahel region is a demographic time bomb and the EU will be faced with some of its consequences in one way or the other.

In the future, the EU might also face a crisis in the western Balkan countries. There is a path for each of them to become an EU member and there are dialogues between them and the EU about how to proceed, but some of them are not yet recognised by all EU countries. Then there is the Israel/Palestine crisis, which is nowadays sometimes forgotten. Although the conflict is not solved yet and the US put it back on the agenda (by planning to build a new embassy in Jerusalem), the EU is still a proponent of the two state solution. Finally, there are various developments which are geographically further away from the EU (like the peace agreement in Colombia or the crisis in Venezuela), that the EU should care about as they all have an impact on the EU (e.g. via trade) as the world is nowadays very much interconnected.

Questions

Q1: Make EU aid programmes (e.g. in Palestine to build houses) make sense if it is simultaneously exporting weapons which help destroy them? A: The EU is not selling weapons, but the member states do and their policies and actions are not always in line with those of the EU. Of course, it would be more convenient if these things would not contradict each other but the EU is a relative new institution and it will take time for its diplomatic role to grow and unify the interests of its member states.

Q2: How is EEAS reconciling EU interest with the interests of its member states? A: Theoretically, all EU member states say that they cannot go without the EU, but in practice this is not yet always the case and they act against the EU interest. In this case, the EU can best be compared with a juggler who is trying to keep different balls in the air and has to find a balance between all the different interests. It will take time to unify them and create a strong and single EU interest. But as some member states are not in NATO it helps them realize that we need to stand as a block.

Q3: first of all, what is EU doing in Venezuela and has it an interest in achieving peace in the country and secondly, does the EU prefer to make (trade) agreements with country groups such as MERCOSUR or with single states? A: I am not an expert in this field but the EU is itself the best example of regional collaboration and stated in the EU Global Strategy that it wants to collaborate more at a regional level with other regions in the world.

Q4: Can we say that the credibility of the EU is improving also by the decreasing credibility of the US and do you think that the EU values are still sustainable or much under attack? A: Even if we assume that the current US administration would stay for two terms (eight years), as most administrations do in the US, this would not be enough to completely destroy all the ties between the EU and the US. It is true that in some cases the credibility of the EU increased because the US is stepping back. With regard to the EU values, I think that we are living in a pragmatic era and that the EU is responding as such internally and externally. The EU is not going to Myanmar to preach about what they are supposed to do but we are trying to create pragmatic deals to improve the situation as much as possible.

Q5: What are the key areas for improvement in the EEAS and the commission? A: Some key areas for improvement are security and defence. The EU spends 50 per cent of what the US spends on defence, but we produce only 15% of what the US is producing. If we unify the defence systems of the EU member states, we can create an economy of scale and become much more efficient in our production. At the same time we aim to improve the collaboration with NATO and PESCO just launched 17 projects last week to support cooperation among member states.

Q6: What is our future relation with Turkey going to look like? A: If Turkey is a candidate country is not only a question for the EU but also for Turkey a matter to decide upon. The EU tries to be

diplomatic and patient; not to rush to conclusions but to keep the door open. If we would say they are not a candidate country anymore, the EU would close the door and disable possible solutions. The deal with Iran has clearly shown that dialogue processes can take very long but diplomacy and dialogue is keeping certain solutions available. Our credibility comes from being a partner who is willing to discuss.

Q7: Is the EU putting sufficient funds into structural development programmes (to make sure that people can stay in their home country and do not need to flee from it)? A: Development is becoming an old concept but European companies are investing in e.g. African companies, and the EU is looking how it can improve the trade and industrial relationship with developing countries. At the same time one of the biggest challenges of the following years will migration. Millions of people will be on the move. It is not necessarily a bad thing. People have always been on the move to search for economic better situations. Most people in this room recently moved to Brussels for the same reason. We call ourselves expats and others economic migrants. But however you will call it, there will be no way to stop this increasing movement across the globe so we should not focus on how to stop it but how we can control it.

Q8: China is on the rise, developing quickly and giving many loans to countries where the EU is not; how is EEAS ensuring that the EU stays competitive? A: It is true that China is investing in many places in the world, not only to show its muscles but also because an ever more open market makes this possible. However, the EU is still the biggest investor in Africa and the Western Balkans and we are the largest trading block in the world, but we should also act as such. So the million dollar question is nowadays about how we can act more together within the EU as a block instead of acting as single states.