

Conference Report **Europe in the World: “Reforming” Foreign and Security Policy**

Wilton Park, Friday 13 – Monday 16 July 2007

The ongoing development of European foreign and security policy was debated at Wilton Park this summer, “reform treaty” was its underlying theme. The opportunities provided by the treaty, such as solving the ever-lasting debate on institutions –or providing with a more coherent structure under the new High Representative– are matched with relevant challenges. A first of these is legitimacy. What happens with the new provisions for the presidency of the Council? Will executive leadership mean less accountability? Is public opinion favourable to the new treaty? Moreover, assuming everything evolves as planned; three crucial nominations at the Commission, the Council, and the new High Representative are likely to end up in complex horse-trading. What today seems to loosen a knot tomorrow might translate into a bottleneck. The mood has been of cautious optimism.

Amongst the most significant aspects of foreign and security policy is the strengthening of the European security and defence policy (ESDP). A great deal of attention has been devoted to this topic at Wilton Park, both from an institutional and practical perspective. Capabilities have been discussed, in particular with regards to the asymmetry amongst member states in this area. The need for a comprehensive strategic concept –one in which not only capabilities but doctrines too are emphasised– needs to be considered. On the capabilities aspect, larger battle groups need to be formed; there is a need for specialisation since not all member states are ready to carry every kind of mission. This also requires collaborative programs in which the costs of new equipment can be diminished. Spending on defence in the EU is high but it is still very inefficient as it is divided amongst the different member states and hence little synergy is achieved.

NATO was, not surprisingly, one of the most salient issues. There were disagreements on the extent of conflict existing between ESDP and NATO; or whether they are as significant as it is usually portrayed –Brussels aside, cooperation seems to be taking place. This is relevant since non-traditional threats such as homeland security and cyber-terrorism require responses which might fall under NATO or ESDP leadership. Perhaps one can observe a division of labour already taking place, NATO focusing on military missions and ESDP on civilian operations. There are, nevertheless, two important aspects which need to be addressed: the participation of France in NATO’s command structure and Turkey. The latter, a central player in NATO operations but mostly

absent in ESDP given its non-EU membership, poses a significant test to the aims of enhanced cooperation.

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) poses a different kind of challenge. Whereas in the enlargement process the EU has set clear rules, ENP is entirely political and has no obligations or clear borders. It is also more “equal” and has fewer resources than enlargement. Moreover, it relies on the cooperation of member states (MS) much more than is the case with enlargement –where the steps and the end destination are clear. This is pertinent when considering issues such as visa regimes, market access or differentiated treatment which are the most relevant incentives the EU can offer through ENP. Relevant too are the differences in positions held by MS towards neighbouring countries. More substantial is the conceptual flaw in dealing with Eastern and Southern countries under a same logic.

The wider role of Europe in the world has also been discussed; in particular regarding Russia and Sino-European relations. The widening of the trade deficit with China is a topic which increasingly calls for attention. Even if most of the deficit can be attributed to western companies producing in China, the asymmetry of its effects amongst EU member states is a cause of concern (Germany for example benefits whilst Southern European economies do not). Moreover, there are important political issues to be resolved; central amongst them is the arms embargo.

Russia, on the other hand, is a challenging partner since the EU does not seem to have a clear policy towards this increasingly important player. The unresolved issues of Kosovo, Poland and the UK; added to the American-led initiative of a missile shield in Europe, keep poisoning bilateral relations. A partnership that goes beyond energy agreements is needed.

Finally, it must be stressed that in order to enact an effective foreign policy, public support is crucial. Even if support towards furthering Europe’s role in the world is strong, this must not be overemphasised. An important aspect of this is making the EU understandable or “sexy” –as was termed at Wilton Park. Whether this is possible –or even desirable– was a much debated topic.

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