

In light of the current Russian War of Aggression in Ukraine, the European Union (EU) currently has taken up a cohesive and rapid response in terms of sanctions and acceptance of Ukrainian refugees, in spite of initial concerns of individual states. However, in comparing EU foreign policy regarding the humanitarian crisis of Ukraine, and related documents such as the Strategic Compass, to policies regarding other neighbouring regions such as Africa, I believe that this decisiveness is brought by accepted norms and established constructed values within the EU, and the priorities dictated by the influence of other global powers, such as the United States' current foreign policy of Great Power Competition, and the Northern Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), such as those listed in the 2022 Strategic Concept. Therefore, I argue that whereas the EU's decisiveness in handling Ukraine is relatively unprecedented, it does not indicate a significant paradigm shift in EU foreign policy in the long run, to the detriment of the EU. I further argue that it would be in the EU's interest to focus on expanding on its long term strategic focus, particularly in regards to Africa, and work towards becoming a more effective and independent geopolitical actor by fundamentally rethinking its existing institutions of decision making and direction setting.

In response to the Russian War of Aggression in Ukraine, the EU has stepped up the scope and breadth of sanctions imposed on Russia since 2014, along with states supporting the current war such as Belarus and Iran, from individuals and entities, to financial transactions such as SWIFT, technologies, and energy resources (EU, 2022). The EU has also provided over € 9 billion in macro-financial assistance on top of € 485 million in humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, and has expedited processing of Ukrainian refugees through the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) (EU, 2022). Furthermore, measures such as the aforementioned TPD activation and provision of military supplies and lethal weapons to Ukraine, a third country, through the European Peace Facility, have never been implemented before in history (Bosse, 2022, International Crisis Group, 2022). The EU's response was seen as unprecedented given the usually slow decision making processes of the EU, especially in fields concerning migration, which has been sensitive and difficult (Bosse, 2022). This consensus among EU member states is further strengthened by the EU's Security Compass, rapidly revised in light of the conflict (EU, 2022).

However, despite celebrations from government officials and scholars, who may see these developments as a turning point for EU foreign policy (Rabinovych, 2022, EU, 2022), scholars such as Steven Blockmans have criticized the EU Strategic Compass, while indicating a consensus among member states regarding Russia's threat, has shortcomings, such as the lack of strategic foresight for not factoring in the implications of China as a geopolitical threat (Blockmans et al, 2022). More importantly, Blockmans et al have indicated concerns that not only have originally intended principles of the Strategic Compass such as 'strategic autonomy' been greatly watered down, direction in the document has also risks causing 'strategic shrinkage' in providing a regional rather global scope for EU foreign policy (Blockmans et al, 2022).

Although European sentiments in the Strategic Compass have been reinforced in partner agencies such as NATO, where multiple member states are also in the EU,

particularly in regards to countering Russian aggression in Ukraine, both documents suffer from the strategic limitations identified by Blockmans (Blockmans et al, 2022). For instance, NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept, in focusing on the threat from Russia, also does not discuss China in depth, rather sharing the same sentiments as the EU Strategic Compass in acknowledging China both as a potential threat while also seeing China as a cooperation partner (NATO, 2022), with no further concrete directions addressing the influence of that state (NATO, 2022, EU, 2022). Having further looked at the policies of crucial allies such as the United States' security architecture in the Great Power Competition, where China plays a more significant factor in US behavior and strategy, Europe is expected to play an insignificant role in the Indo-Pacific, with the United States preferring to utilize partnerships such as ANKUS, Japan and Korea rather than NATO and the European states, in contrast to Russia where NATO is seen as a key ally in countering it (Congressional Research Service, 2022).

In order to further demonstrate the lack of a paradigm shift in foreign policy, I would like to take a closer look at EU foreign policy towards Africa. With the war in Ukraine reducing Russian energy supplies, given its geographical proximity, Africa has been seen as a potential supplier of energy to Europe, both through LNG from Sahel countries such as Nigeria, and renewable energy from Morocco (Forbes, 2022). At the same time, Russia has taken measures to increase its influence within the continent, from the signing of security agreements with African countries, to the deployment of Russian affiliated military groups such as the Wagner Group, and disinformation campaigns aimed at countries in the region (Herd, 2022), to the detriment of European interests. It would have been logical that the European Union, in the event of a paradigm shift of EU foreign policy, with further indications of strategic autonomy, would have seen a change in EU strategy towards Africa, with a more cohesive and greater emphasis on the region both in investments and security, and a resolution of long standing issues of migrants and refugees comparable with EU action regarding Ukrainian refugees.

However, the current EU Strategic Compass has failed to provide any change of policy regarding the region. Blockmans et al. have criticized that the Strategic Compass has only mentioned cooperation with the African Union, without elaboration on specific countries and regions (Blockmans et al, 2022), nor has the Strategic Compass, as I argue, provided any concrete plans for furthering dialogue or engagement, that differs from currently existing approaches, or corrects failures of previous EU-AU cooperation attempts identified by scholars such as Anna Katharina Stahl (Stahl, 2018). Where regions are concerned on the EU Strategic Compass, the document only makes references to areas where European and NATO states have more or less had an interest before the Russian war of aggression, such as the Horn of Africa, where NATO has conducted anti-piracy missions for the past two decades (NATO, 2022), and the Sahel, where individual member states such as France have already been involved for decades (Rieker, 2022, Vallin, 2015). Even for regions where France has had significant military presence, the stepping up of other EU member states, as noted by Pernille Rieker, has caused negative reactions in countries such as Mali, which reached out to the Russian Wagner Group, which arguably damaged EU credibility in taking initiative (Rieker, 2022). Other African regions such as East Africa, have simply not been addressed in the EU Policy Compass, despite states in that region having received EU partnerships and

investment through the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, as part of the greater initiative of stemming migrant flows and encouraging migrant returns, along with the fact that these initiatives are being under pressure both by diverging expectations between the EU and individual African states, and from COVID-19 in the previous year, as observed by scholars such as Tsion Tadesse Abebe (Abede and Maunganidze, 2021).

Although European Union rhetoric regarding energy independence has escalated with the Commission's establishment of REPowerEU, aiming to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels by saving, diversifying, and seeking cleaner energy sources, including potential energy exporters in Sub-Saharan Africa (EU, 2022), this has not been a new development, as the EU has already been working with various regions of Africa in expanding investment in green energy through the Africa-EU Energy Partnership (AEEP) for 15 years, since the 2007 Lisbon Summit (EU, 2022, EU, 2018), along with certain North African countries such as Morocco and Algeria through the Southern Neighbourhood Economic and Investment Plan before the escalation of the Russian war against Ukraine in 2022 (EU, 2021). Therefore, discussions regarding energy and green energy partnerships with Africa have not been something new. As discussed by scholars such as Sebastian Oberthur, up until recently, external energy policy discussions in the EU have emphasized Russia as a main supplier of gas and other fossil fuels (Oberthur et al, 2022), which I argue is not only an indication of the relative lack of strategic foresight from the EU, but is also an indication that Africa, despite prior foreign policy attempts, is still an overlooked region in EU foreign policy.

Furthermore, as acknowledged by scholars such as Andrew Geddes and Shada Islam, there remains a contradiction regarding attitudes in the EU regarding Ukrainian refugees and migrants from Africa (Dempsey, 2022). Scholars such as Giselle Bosse have acknowledged that 'while EU decision making, especially regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, have been driven by constructivist norms and identities of being in the 'West', along with principles such as territorial integrity, rights based norms of protecting refugees, and moral obligation to prevent human rights atrocities, an element of these values also stem from the perceived 'Europeanness' of Ukraine, and the sometimes racist and xenophobic ideals of what being 'European' meant (Bosse, 2022). Thus, we see there being no paradigm shift of EU foreign policy in regards to refugees, with protection being selectively applied on the basis of perceived values and identities, and in response to what is seen to be an 'European' issue as opposed to the 'other' from Africa.

Therefore, EU foreign policy, especially regarding Africa, both before the conflict in Ukraine and at present, remains differentiated at best, and overlooked at worst, and has yet to be a credible diplomatic force that is easily accepted by African states, with no significant shifts.

Having identified EU foreign policy as lacking in strategic autonomy, and without any significant shift, I argue that the EU's foreign policy remains fragile and subject to the current more turbulent diplomatic environment. The implications of the status quo includes questions on European capacity to act independently, should the goals of EU partners diverge from the present plan. This includes the United States, whose policy shifts due to changes in government from elections have already been felt during the Trump Administration, as expressed by the sentiments of Angela Merkel (Blockmans et al. 2022, Dempsey, 2022), and

whose rules based order cannot be confidently relied on by the EU. At the same time, while Europe remains united against Russia at present, future developments such as the ongoing energy crisis and changes in national governments may threaten to harm the cohesiveness of EU foreign policy towards Russia, while hampering the independent addressing of long term strategic gaps such as China as a geopolitical challenge, threatening to render the EU a regional rather than global power.

In order to rectify some of the aforementioned concerns, changes to the EU's foreign policy institutions and processes are required. Nicola Chelotti lists two decision making processes in the EU, the intergovernmental process, where strong inputs are made by national governments in pushing their priorities, especially given how foreign affairs are more key to sovereignty compared to economy, and the institutional perspective, where EU structures in Brussels play a bigger role (Chelotti, 2016). I argue that a majority of EU policy corresponds to the former, which hinders decision making, while the latter is currently limited and requires strengthening. Thus, as suggested by Lehne, one method of improving decision making processes in the EU, given differing priorities of multiple member states, is changing decision making by qualified majority vote in place of unanimity (Lehne, 2022). Although Chelotti recognizes that the European External Action Service (EEAS) has certain potential in steering policy and agenda setting (Chelotti, 2016), the EEAS has been structurally deficient, lacking the capacity in effectively coordinating between the Commission and member states, or driving policies as an institution (Lehne, 2022). Strengthening the EEAS, or consolidating EEAS roles back into the Commission, as argued by Lehne, is required. Only through streamlining and restructuring can effective foreign policy be achieved going forward.

(1997 Words)

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