

SDA Roundtable

Assessing the value of security strategy reviews

Panel title: "*Are security strategies a growing embarrassment to policymakers?*"

- I would like to thank Giles for his kind invitation: it is always a pleasure to speak at SDA events;
- I have only been given five minutes for my presentation, and I know how ruthless Giles can be about time, so I shall get right into it;
- I hope you will understand if I, as a Member of the European Parliament, focus my remarks on the EU's European Security Strategy;
- In October 2007, I took part in another SDA panel discussion in this very building; the question back then was "*Does the EU's broader approach to security yet add up to a strategy?*";
- Back then I answered the question with a heartfelt *yes* - the European Security Strategy *does* contain a broad and very useful approach to security - and emphasized that "*it is not a new strategy we need, but rather a greater sense of urgency in implementing the one we have*";

- As for today's title, I think that security strategies don't *have* to be an embarrassment for policymakers; the 2003 ESS, for example, remains a relevant, concise and genuinely useful document;
- 2008 was supposed to be the year of the revision of the ESS; **everyone agreed that nothing spectacular was needed**, apart, perhaps, from some updates on the responsibility to protect, cyber security, energy security and climate change, since the main thrust of the 2003 was still valid;
- **Unfortunately, what came out of the whole process was a muddle**: a so-called "*Report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy*", which is in fact an **incoherent *pot-pourri*** of genuine updates, clichés, vague goals and - most annoyingly - a **sort of 12-page long self-congratulatory pat on the EU's own back for doing so well these last five years**;
- A few examples: the section on the *proliferation of weapons of mass destruction* is well drafted and finishes with a clear programme of action for the future; the part on *terrorism* and *organised crime* is much vaguer, but remains relevant; but that only makes three threats out of the five mentioned in the 2003 ESS: anyone who knows the original document will have to deal with the frustration of not finding any reference to *state failure* and *regional conflicts*; were these important threats totally forgotten? Or does the EU not have anything

to add about them? If not, why? Have we not learned anything from our experiences in Somalia and Afghanistan?;

- As for the so-called new threats (cyber security, energy security and climate change), they are somewhat awkwardly added on to the three old ones, which begs the question: why is there not a separate section for new threats explaining why they became relevant?;
- Also, it seems policymakers have decided that just mentioning these new issues would do the trick; in fact, vague sentences in the section on energy security like "*our policy should **address transit routes, including through Turkey and Ukraine***" *reveal more about the EU's hesitations and failures than they present a clear solution to existing problems;*
- Section II on *Building Stability in Europe and Beyond* presents a Christmas tree-like panoply of past achievements; some of them are very real, others are more questionable; for example, the three and a half lines that are dedicated to Small Arms and Light Weapons in the report, are clearly little more than a fig leaf to hide the embarrassing fact that for years the EU has been paralysed in its anti-Small Arms policies due to a silly Court case between Commission and Council;

- The same goes for the passage on Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration: mentioning the tiny ESDP missions in the DRC and Guinea-Bissau as major SSR and DDR achievements gives a false impression of dynamism in two areas where the EU has a wealth of strategies and plans, but little to show by way of actual results;
- I think it is unfortunate that, in this case, **policy-makers could not resist the temptation of turning the review of the ESS into a public relations document** aimed at selling the EU's achievements since 2003; in *this document, the forward-looking paragraphs are, for the most part, not ambitious enough to stand out in the midst of an otherwise bland document;*
- The only way policy-makers can avoid having security strategies and security strategy reviews turn into embarrassing exercises is *if they fulfil two conditions:*

1. First, *they must be forward-looking* and only invoke past achievements to the extent that they are needed to learn lessons for the future;

2. Second, *they must have some practical value*, or they must point to clear - if not even measurable - goals, otherwise they will not have any doctrinal value and they will fail to become guiding documents in their field;

- To conclude, maybe there is a third condition for success; it is best expressed by a simple sentence: "*if it ain't broken, don't fix it*" - don't just produce a document because people want a new toy to play with; the 2003 ESS was very relevant, the 2008 review was not;