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It is Time the EU Learns the Language of Power

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These monographic papers analyze ongoing developments within the European Union as well as recent trends which influence the EU's relationship with the rest of the world. Broad themes include, but are not limited to:

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- The Euro zone crisis
- Immigration and cultural challenges
- Security threats and responses
- The EU's neighborhood policy
- The EU and Latin America
- The EU as a model and reference in the world
- Relations with the United States
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These topics form part of the pressing agenda of the EU and represent the multifaceted and complex nature of the European integration process. These papers also seek to highlight the internal and external dynamics which influence the workings of the EU and its relationship with the rest the world.

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It is Time the EU Learns the Language of Power

Josephine Gray*

“People only accept change when they are faced with necessity, and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them. Make men work together, show them that beyond their differences and geographical boundaries there lies a common interest.” - Jean Monnet, 1979

Introduction¹

For decades, the European Union has considered itself a referee to the games played by sovereign states around it. The EU bases its foreign policy on peace and unity, and as past European Commission President Romano Prodi stated, with the hopes to be surrounded by a “ring of friends”. All of this was wrapped in the EU mindset that it is responsible for upholding international peace, much like the United Nations. Many believe this mentality is becoming detrimental to the politics of Europe. The European Union needs to become a global player, fluent in the language of power. This is becoming apparent by the countless times it has been stepped on by other countries. However, how it will achieve this new mentality and strength remains unclear and highly debated.

Keywords: European Union, member states, international peace, United Nations, global player

I. Background

The European Union needs to toughen up to allow its goals to become realities. “It’s perhaps no surprise Europe’s methods are fading to irrelevance. After all, when rules lose their relevance, who needs referees?”² This quote by Hans Kribbe describes Europe’s current foreign political climate perfectly. Europe consistently plays the moderator, hoping to bring peace within countries, however these countries seem to not listen or even care. An example being how European officials are failing to penalize world leaders who have been acting unlawfully. This can be shown through the measures taken against Putin after the “poisoning of opposition figure

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² Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

Alexei Navalny”³. This hardly deterred Putin considering this is not the first time he has committed acts such as this. “Former Russian double agent Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia were poisoned with Novichok in 2018” as well as “the Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko died from radioactive polonium poisoning in London in 2006”⁴. Due to the unanimity of the Council needed for foreign policy actions, little has been done to punish Russia for this unruly behavior. Within the leaders of the EU “there's always somebody there who wants to do Putin a favor, and because of that, the EU effectively can't act.”⁵ In the most recent case of Navalny, French President Emmanuel Macron vetoed foreign policy punishments toward Russia, believing that continuing dialogue was more important. Another example of ineffective punishment to an unlawful ruler is shown through the compliance to Trump's recklessness. “He has started trade wars, imposed sanctions, threatened to pull out of NATO and upended the transatlantic relationship”⁶. He even identified the EU as “one of the country's biggest foes”⁷. This certainly does not describe the vision of Romano Prodi as a Union, “surrounded by friends”. Instead, “the Continent finds itself encircled by czars, sultans and emperors, ruthlessly playing the EU.”⁸ The EU is surrounded by competitive sovereign states that neglect many of the peaceful regulations wanted by Europe.

II. Analysis

The inability for the Europe Union to enact some of its international agenda is making it seem weak. In turn, this is causing the EU's credibility on foreign policy to be “at stake”. An example being that EU foreign ministers were unable to achieve the unanimity necessary to impose sanctions against Belarus and its strongman ruler, Alexander Lukashenko. The “EU countries agree on the sanctions, but Cyprus has refused to give its approval in an attempt to force other EU nations to support tougher sanctions against Turkey in a dispute over drilling for

³ Ridgwell, Henry. “Critics Demand Stronger European Response to Poisoning of Russian Dissidents.” *Voice of America*, 6 Oct. 2020, www.voanews.com/europe/critics-demand-stronger-european-response-poisoning-russian-dissidents

⁴ Ridgwell, Henry. “Critics Demand Stronger European Response to Poisoning of Russian Dissidents.” *Voice of America*, 6 Oct. 2020, www.voanews.com/europe/critics-demand-stronger-european-response-poisoning-russian-dissidents

⁵ Ridgwell, Henry. “Critics Demand Stronger European Response to Poisoning of Russian Dissidents.” *Voice of America*, 6 Oct. 2020, www.voanews.com/europe/critics-demand-stronger-european-response-poisoning-russian-dissidents

⁶ Colson, Thomas. “Trump Says the European Union Was 'Formed in Order to Take Advantage of the United States'.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 15 July 2020, www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-says-european-union-formed-take-advantage-united-states-2020-7.

⁷ Colson, Thomas. “Trump Says the European Union Was 'Formed in Order to Take Advantage of the United States'.” *Business Insider*, Business Insider, 15 July 2020, www.businessinsider.com/donald-trump-says-european-union-formed-take-advantage-united-states-2020-7.

⁸ Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

energy resources in the Mediterranean Sea.”⁹. According to Josep Borrell, the ministers did not even attempt to reach unanimity at their meeting, knowing that Cyprus would block the decision. The meeting was also described as “embarrassing” and a “disappointment”, since the “deadlock over sanctions policy comes just days after European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave her State of the Union speech in which she urged national leaders to allow such decisions to be taken using qualified majority voting and complained about some countries holding EU foreign policy hostage for selfish reasons.”¹⁰. This lack of unity between Council leaders is a troublesome look for the European Union. On the one hand, Josep Borrell described his dissatisfied view on the problem in Belarus¹¹. On the other hand, Ursula Van der Leyen only days previous, stated her opposing views to unanimity, which then became the main reason for failure of action in Belarus. The leaders seem to be in different directions on the issue, which is causing them to look disorganized and unofficial. It is understandable that countries watching this issue unravel are having trouble taking the EU seriously as a global power. The unanimity necessary as well as the intermediary mindset, is not only causing the EU to act as a go-between when getting involved in other countries but failing to enact any real changes as well.

The EU needs to seriously reconsider tactics so that it may become not only a world actor, but a world power. To achieve this, “it needs a stronger euro and more robust trade policies”¹². The foreign policy agenda of the European union is described “with the goals of strengthening the security of the EU, promoting peace and international security in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter”¹³. The EU promotes international cooperation, democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. This is a noble and idealistic foreign policy agenda. If all countries were to agree and comply to such actions placed by the EU, the world would be a more peaceful and cooperative place. As seen through historical context, material power is responded to with more urgency than cooperation. This is shown through the United States. The US is the world’s biggest national economy, which controls the world’s leading international currency and has by far the largest military. For these reasons alone, its voice is much louder, and is listened to more intently when it comes to resolving international problems. Great power is still defined in military terms and “as long as there is no joint EU military, or until we rethink how we understand power and influence in the world, the impact of

⁹ Herszenhorn, David M., and Jacopo Barigazzi. “Borrell Admits EU's Credibility 'at Stake' over Failure to Sanction Belarus.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 22 Sept. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/borrell-admits-eu-credibility-is-at-stake-in-failure-to-sanction-belarus/.

¹⁰ Herszenhorn, David M., and Jacopo Barigazzi. “Borrell Admits EU's Credibility 'at Stake' over Failure to Sanction Belarus.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 22 Sept. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/borrell-admits-eu-credibility-is-at-stake-in-failure-to-sanction-belarus/.

¹¹ Herszenhorn, David M., and Jacopo Barigazzi. “Borrell Admits EU's Credibility 'at Stake' over Failure to Sanction Belarus.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 22 Sept. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/borrell-admits-eu-credibility-is-at-stake-in-failure-to-sanction-belarus/.

¹² Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

¹³ “The EU as a Global Actor.” *European Union Politics*, by John McCormick, Red Globe Press, 2020, pp. 427–441.

the EU is likely to be constrained.”¹⁴ This brings us back to how the problem can be fixed. The circling idea is a large joint military of the EU, bringing the intensity and authority that the EU is now lacking. Another potential successful reform would be addressing how foreign policies are agreed upon, calling “for majority voting on foreign policy instead of unanimity, to allow for more flexibility and faster action when it comes to imposing sanctions”¹⁵. This is an easy and effective way of starting the process of becoming a global player. This would have caused a different conclusion for the EU dealing with the poisoning case in Russia as well as its resolution to Belarus. Overall, the EU “needs a new mindset, strategic reflexes and the ethos of a “player.” It must grasp what it means to be a player — existentially and morally — and begin to reason like one”¹⁶.

III. Conclusion

Although it is true that the EU is a successful normative power, higher material capabilities are necessary. Foreign policy of the EU has taken a turn toward low production. It needs to reassess its strategies to become a powerful world player. With changes such as a large joint military and a new policy creation approach, Europe can make its foreign policies listened to with higher intent. Unlawful rulers may start to listen with greater respect. Also, a higher number of policies may be taken into action if unanimity is not necessary. The European Union has honorable current ideas for the international agenda, but the rest of the world is not ready to be as progressive. Thus, in order to survive, the EU must begin to act as the others do, a global sovereign player.

¹⁴ Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

¹⁵ Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

¹⁶ Kribbe, Hans. “No More Mr. Nice Europe.” *POLITICO*, POLITICO, 13 Oct. 2020, www.politico.eu/article/no-more-mr-nice-europe-eu-foreign-policy/.

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