Global Europe

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The External Relations of the European Union

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Preface

I wrote a major part of this book during my stay at the University of Granada in the late summer and autumn of 2017. It was a good place to reflect on Europe as a global player. More than 500 years ago, in 1492 to be precise, this southern Spanish city—the last stronghold of Arab rulers on the Iberian peninsula—was recaptured. With this, the 'Moors' not only lost their 'European capital of Islam', but also ended eight centuries of more or less peaceful co-existence between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. The Catholic King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile celebrated their *reconquista* by rather fanatically giving shape to the restored unity of Spain. Jews and Muslims were presented with a simple choice: they could leave the country or convert to Christianity. Religious intolerance was a fact, and dissenters came into direct contact with the Inquisition instituted by the same *Reyes Católicos*.

1492 was also the year that the Catholic Kings had a historic conversation with Christopher Columbus, in the hamlet of Santa Fe, a few miles from Granada. He was commissioned to discover a faster westward route to Asia, as recorded in the *Capitulaciones* of 17 April. Unhindered by a thorough knowledge of actual distances and packed with an insufficient supply of food, Columbus had fortune on his side and found an unknown continent in the middle. Europe's overseas expansion towards America had begun, as well as the Eurocentric view of world affairs that was to last for centuries. Global Europe was born.

In the course of the 19th century, this situation gradually came to an end and a process was started that was once summarised by the British historian Geoffrey Barraclough as 'the dwarfing of Europe' (Barraclough 1967). World politics was lifted out of its Eurocentric phase by the rise of two superpowers on the flanks of (Western) Europe—the United States and Russia—together with the emancipation and ultimate liberation of non-European peoples from the colonial embrace of modern imperialism. In the 20th century, the 'European world' was replace by a contemporary version of the Treaty of Tordesillas—the 1494 agreement between Spain and Portugal that divided the non-European world between the two kingdoms. No country or people could escape the all-dominating conflict between two systems, capitalism and communism, and the bipolar balance of power between the new superpowers. They were responsible for the division of the world into two almost mutually exclusive spheres of influence.

This short 20th century of bipolarity and Cold War—which began with the Russian revolution of 1917 and abruptly ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the subsequent velvet revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe, and the collapse of the Soviet Union—is now history and has sunk deep into our collective

memory. As a young man I experienced the final phase of the Cold War, including the threat of a nuclear confrontation, but as an international relations professor at the University of Amsterdam I have to do my best to convince today's students of the importance of this theme. After all, communism has disappeared as a factor of political power, and new conflicts are emerging, often with a religious element. Mutual deterrence with nuclear arms has given way to a joint effort to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weaponry to so-called rogue states.

The world has indeed changed dramatically in the last three decades. In the following, I will distinguish three major changes. The purpose of this is to outline the context within which recent discussions about the EU's external relations—and more specifically about whether Europe can regain its role as a global player—take place.

The world has become smaller. Even though, according to some, this process began in the early 19th century, there is no doubt that it has been accelerating since the 1980s. It is, after all, only in recent years that everyone seems to be talking about 'globalisation'. Time and space have shrunk due to technological innovations, including in the areas of communication and financial economic services, and due to the removal of barriers to the cross-border flow of goods and capital.

The world has become multipolar. The role of Russia in its former sphere of influence has largely been played out, and that of the US is now subject to serious erosion. At the same time, new powers are emerging. The rise of China appeals most to the imagination, but countries such as India, Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey are also increasingly refusing to be subservient to the former superpowers. For the first time in human history, the decentralisation of power in the international system is coinciding with an unprecedented level of interdependence (mainly economic). Multipolarity and globalisation together make a unique combination.

The world has become more liberal but also more unequal and less democratic. This is the most complicated and perhaps most disputed change, especially regarding the correlations between these trends. The end of the Cold War resulted in all kinds of prophecies about new world orders: the end of history, and the renaissance of liberal, political, and economic values and norms—all well and good, but reality turned out to be considerably more unmanageable. The loss of the discipline that had been maintained within the spheres of influence went hand in hand with an increase in the number of civil wars and subsequent refugee flows. The emergence of new economies, while reducing the gap between these countries and the developed world, increased the differences in prosperity within these economies. This explains in part the political-authoritarian tendencies in these countries. In the US and Europe too, socio-economic differences have widened, and dissatisfaction is on the rise. It would therefore be erroneous to speak of an irresistible (and irreversible)

triumph of liberalism after 1989. Resistance is increasing and taking on various shapes, including violent forms of expression.

Where do the member states of the European Union stand in these three processes? To what extent are they instigators, targets, or even victims of these processes? And what effects do the three processes have on the process of European unification? Will they help or hinder Europe to become a global player?

Regarding the first change, the EU member states have made an important contribution, separately and in unison, to what we call economic globalisation. Margaret Thatcher was wrong when she stated in the 1980s that global capitalism left her no choice but to pursue a policy of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation ('There is no alternative', was her famous one-liner). In reality, it was Thatcher herself—and later other European governments—who set the invisible hand of free-market capitalism in motion. It was a deliberate strategy to break through so-called rigid patterns and to protect capitalism against the capitalists (and in the case of Thatcher to protect it against the labour movement too). From the moment the crisis of European integration of the 1970s and early 1980s came to a remarkable and sudden end with the relaunch of the integration process—through the completion of the internal market and the establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union— the EU played a pro-active role in globalisation. Instead of being a victim, the EU member states were one of the main drivers behind this process.

With regard to the second change, the role of the EU is different. In the burgeoning multipolar world of state-centric thinking and power politics, 'Europe as a global player' still has little meaning (or so it is generally assumed, not least by the emerging powers). This can be attributed to the nature of the EU itself. The European Union is not a union in a literal sense, and it is certainly not a state. At best, we can speak of a European society, inspired by the famous distinction made by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (and later further developed by Max Weber) between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*. A *Gesellschaft* (society) is a social organisation based on indirect transactions and impersonal, contractual, and regulated relationships; affection and solidarity between individual members play no role in it. The choice to cooperate is based on rational grounds and on mutual interest. Viewed in this way, the member states of the EU form, at best, a cross-border society. The EU largely lacks a political superstructure and most definitely lacks a common social basis. In its current form, this stunted union is not an actor (or factor, for that matter) in power politics, and it is not a full-fledged player in the multipolar world. And the EU member states on their own are too small to secure a seat at the table themselves.

The third change is the direct consequence of what academics call the neoliberal turn of the 1980s and 1990s. During this period, a shift took place from Keynesian demand steering—which was characteristic of the decades of economic growth

following the Second World War—towards a supply-side oriented optimisation of the conditions for profitable and risk-averse business. Governments gradually withdrew from the economy and embraced the neoliberal mantra of liberalisation, deregulation, and privatisation with varying degrees of success and diverse social consequences. There were and still are clear differences between 'old' Europe and the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. The same applies to the northern member states of the eurozone compared to the southern member states, with Greece as the clearest example of the latter group. If we look at individual citizens within the member states, we see similar differences between groups of people. Neoliberalism has its winners but also its losers. People get a well-paid job or lose a poorly paid job, take advantage of speculation-driven real estate prices or are driven out to the peripheries of big cities by these same speculators, and subsequently come into contact with people from other areas with different cultures... and so on.

The time has come to make the connection between the three major changes in the world and the actual subject of this book: the external relations of the EU. We start with the third change.

The world has become more liberal but also more unequal and less democratic. The overarching theme of 'Global Europe' problematises the role of the EU in a changing world. A central concept we will use here is actorness. We will look for the factors and actors that contribute to strengthening the EU's capacity to act in the global system. At present, the power the EU projects to the outside world is largely determined by the degree of cohesion within the EU. We are not only talking about cohesion and cooperation between the 28 member states but also about social cohesion within member states. We will see later in this book that the precise form and content of the relaunch of European integration in the 1980s and 1990s had an important leverage role in the neoliberal turn. As a result, European citizens who suffered the most from these policy changes—or at least believed that they were among the losers, that they were no longer being heard by the traditional political elites, and therefore that they had been demoted to second-class citizens—began to turn against 'Europe'. However, it was not necessarily Europe and the EU that were selling the myths of free market and positive-sum, but rather the representatives and propagators of neoliberal ideology. Nonetheless, Europe was (and is) the perfect scapegoat. An important component of the populist revolt of recent decades is Euroscepticism, or dissatisfaction with the process of European integration. This has irrevocable consequences for the external actorness of the EU, on the one hand because opposition within member states to the union in general and deeper integration in particular is increasing, and on the other hand because the internal problems of the EU are influencing perceptions and expectations *outside* the EU with regard to Europe as a global player—or 'Global Europe', for short.

The world has become multipolar. As mentioned, the Russian Federation and the US no longer play the dominant and hegemonic roles they used to. Partly due to the processes of economic liberalisation and globalisation, countries such as China and India have been able to catch up at an impressive pace, first economically but now also politically and militarily. The rise of these countries is one explanation for the movement towards a multipolar world; the weakening of the former superpowers is another. The collapse of the Soviet Union speaks for itself, but the hegemony of the US is no longer undisputed either. This has two consequences for the EU. The Russian bear has emerged from the Cold War weakened, but has been making frantic attempts in recent years to regain some of its international prestige, whether or not in reaction to provocations by NATO and the EU. And the US is less willing or able to continue leading the Western world or to offer a permanent and unconditional security guarantee to EU member states. Both developments point in the same direction: it looks as though member states will have to stand on their own feet in the arena of power politics. If this analysis is correct, are EU member states fully aware of this and are they prepared to join forces? Are they willing to strive for more collective action in the field of external relations? And what type of external relations will they give priority to? What will the improvement in the EU's capacity to act be focused on?

The world has become smaller. The EU is a political drawf but an economic giant— that much is clear. The economic giant has to deal with undesirable demographic developments and will increasingly have to depend on non-European growth for its own prosperity. (In that sense, one can suspect that the EU views the phenomenon of 'trade wars' with dismay.) At the same time, and as a result of the aforementioned rise of the 'new economies', the EU is witnessing an increase in international competition. The fact that the world is becoming smaller has another effect: not only do products move around the globe, but people too, whether forced to do so or not. The losers on a global scale are relocating to other countries and will continue to do so in the future. This poses the EU – with its porous external borders and open internal borders – with a serious problem. The way in which the influx of migrants (and the fear of such an influx) has been handled in various member states points to the extent and complexity of this problem. And so we are back to 'the excluded', the counterforces, and the Eurosceptics we have already encountered (and, in a certain way, back to the intolerance in Granada after the *reconquista*.)

The external relations of the EU
There are multiple dilemmas. The EU must think about its future as a global player. Does it still make sense to play the 'soft power' card (positive incentives), with trade and development policy as its main trumps? If not, what should the EU do to increase its 'hard power' (military means)? Is there enough support within the current EU to achieve deeper integration in a sensitive area such as defence?

This book is about the *external relations* of the EU in a broad sense. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), launched by the Maastricht Treaty (1991) and intended to coordinate Europe's diplomatic relations with third countries and to promote cooperation in external security, is a component of these external relations. In addition, European treaties use concepts such as 'external action of the EU' and 'external dimensions of the internal action of the EU'. External action concerns in particular the EU's policy on trade, development, and expansion—policy areas that are directly and explicitly aimed at relations with the outside world. Although internal EU policy is primarily a matter that concerns member states, it often has external consequences or is influenced by external factors. Two examples—agricultural policy and energy policy—illustrate this perfectly. In the first case, interventions to support European farmers have long determined the EU's trade and development relations. In the second, Europe's energy supply is to a large extent dependent on geopolitical developments elsewhere.

In this book, external relations are thus more broadly defined than 'external action' because they are taken to also include the intergovernmental CFSP (and the Common Security and Defence Policy introduced later), as well as the international or global dimensions of internal policies. Incidentally, the dividing lines between internal and external policy, between the various policy areas and between 'soft' and 'hard' policy are in reality difficult to establish. For example, relations between the EU and the US have a major impact on the workings of the EU's political system; international trade and development are inextricably linked; trade wars and their consequences can hardly be described as 'soft'; and so on. In the course of this book, it will become clear that the many policy topics and policy measures are often intertwined in surprising ways.

The structure of this book

This book was initially written as an introduction to the external relations of the EU. As such, the subject forms an integral part of a more general introduction to the field of international relations. This explains to some extent the structure of the book: it starts with a discussion of theories and then gradually turns to a more empirical treatment of various policy areas. I say gradually because in the empirical chapters I also refer to more abstract concepts such as power, cohesion, and security.

The first two chapters deal with the most important theoretical approaches and debates within three closely related disciplines. Chapter 1 starts by reviewing a number of theories in the field of international relations. Two central themes—the role of the state in the international system and the importance of ideas in shaping inter-state relationships—are immediately relevant to the question of whether the EU can survive (and even make a difference) as a hybrid, polycentric organisation in a world of sovereign states. This is followed by a discussion of what are

called European integration theories, which are partly indebted to the IR theories discussed earlier in the chapter but which sometimes also emphasise the unique nature of the European integration process. An important difference of opinion centres on whether EU countries are willing and/or able to transfer their powers in various policy areas to a higher supranational authority. It goes without saying that we are dealing here with the possibility (or impossibility) of EU actorness in relation to the outside world. To what extent can unity in diversity continue to tip towards national interest-based diversity before we cease referring to Europe as a global player? This question is dealt with in chapter 2, which focuses on the most important insights from the literature on the factors and actors behind the shaping and development of foreign policy. We see that the usual one-liners such as '*the* foreign policy of the US' conceal the reality of a constant power struggle between many domestic actors. The outcome in the form of actual foreign policy actions is a reflection of that power struggle. The 'general interest' (as a motto of foreign policy) does not exist if we dissect how that policy came to be. Clearly, this applies to the EU to a much greater extent. Caution is thus required when we speak of '*the* EU as a global player'.

The three main policy areas of the EU's external action are dealt with in chapters 3 to 5. Chapter 3 examines the EU's trade policy. The deepening of economic integration in Europe goes hand in hand with an increasingly clear separation between internal and external (or international) markets. This requires that the EU member states have a common trade policy and a supranational negotiator who can interact with third countries on behalf of the member states. But here, too, this negotiator—in the EU's case, the European Commission—is part of a complex power configuration. We will see that the development of the EU's trade policy since the mid-1980s reflects the aforementioned neoliberal turn and the power relations underlying it.

In Chapter 4 we switch the focus onto European development policy. From the very beginning, the EU has played a dominant role in global development cooperation. Here too, it is more accurate to speak of 'the EU and its member states' because a large part of the financial efforts are still generated at the national level. Special attention is given to the relationship between trade and development and the gradual subordination of the latter objective to the enlightened self-interest of the EU in further global trade liberalisation.

The EU's enlargement strategy, which is the third policy area that falls under external action, is examined in Chapter 5. The EU has always been attractive to neighbouring European countries, and every so often some of these countries have applied for membership. But it was only after the end of the Cold War—and in response to the massive interest from Central and Eastern Europe—that the EU formulated a more or less coherent strategy to guide the accession of these new

democracies. This strategy is based on transformative power, a reference to the role the EU has played in the double transformation process in Central and Eastern Europe from authoritarian rule to democracy and from state-led to free-market economies.

Chapter 6 brings a number of lines together: economic and monetary policy (internal action and its international dimension) is linked to security policy (internal and external action plus CFSP). The architects of the new Europe failed to complete the constructs of single market and single currency with social and political union. The one-sided emphasis on market integration, austerity measures, and structural reforms had—and still has—implications for the EU's external actorness, as is argued in this chapter, partly because this has increased the socio-economic differences between and within member states and fueled opposition to the EU. Anyone who is against Europe is certainly not concerned with 'Europe as global player'. This existential internal crisis has taken on a multiple international security dimension in the 2010s. Persistent conflicts and civil wars in the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa, the explosive combination of population growth and underdevelopment, a sharp increase in migration flows, and the revival of Cold War rhetoric are only the most visible and pressing dilemmas that an unstable EU faces. In the second part of chapter 6, we analyse how the EU has so far dealt with these 'challenges' within the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy.

In the epilogue we will return to the changes in the international system—and the dilemmas they pose—mentioned at the beginning of this foreword. Here, we will also speculate about the likelihood that Europe will become a global player that not only addresses its own security but also makes an effective contribution to the many global problems facing humanity in the 21st century.

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