# The Construction of 'European Security' in *The European Union in a changing global environment*: A Systematic Analysis

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## Abstract

In June 2015 HR Mogherini presented her strategic assessment of *The European Union in a changing global environment* as the express point of reference for the new *EU Global Strategy*. Grounded in the premise that Mogherini's assessment is not simply a description of the state of the world but plays into the construction of social reality and 'European security', this study sets out to understand the openings and closings of possibilities that the document holds. The analysis generates a number of concrete insights about the nature of the perceived threats and the EU in the world of the '21st century reality', and the importance of 'regions' as a guiding organisational category. Importantly, it finds an intriguing combination of openings and closings that the construction of 'European security' in *The European Union in a changing global environment* holds. On the one side, it holds the possibility of a radical re-thinking of conventional socio-political conceptions, such as 'power' and 'borders'. The world, as such, is opened up to be 're-thought'. On the other side, EU-institutions are discursively 'protected' and conserved as they are constructed as the mirror of the »complex« world and its »21st century realities«. Generally, the possibilities and openings of *The European Union in a changing global environment* holds are somewhat 'tamed' through modern premises, privileging a distinct, desirable security behaviour, namely one that is flexible, pro-active, adjustable, effective and efficient, and, yet, at the same time, grounded in contextual knowledge.

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# 1. Introduction

In June 2016 High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) Federica Mogherini is expected to present a new EU global strategy on foreign and security policy (*EU Global Strategy*). This new strategy is meant to replace the 2003 strategy *A Secure Europe in a Better World* (ESS 2003). The development of the new *EU Global Strategy* is designed as a consultative and inclusive process.

The basis for the new strategy paper and the consultative process around it is the document *The European Union in a changing global environment: A more connected, contested and complex world* (EU 2015). In this document the HR assesses the EU's security environment and its threats. It was presented to the European Council and the public in June 2015.

The aim of my study is to understand the web of meanings that is constructed in the document *The European Union in a changing global environment: A more connected, contested and complex world* as a central discursive moment in the development of the *EU Global Strategy*. I call this web of meanings 'European security'. My endeavour is motivated by the theoretical premise that this web of meanings is constitutive of social reality and that »[c]onstructions of reality and codes of intelligibility out of which they are produced provide both conditions of possibility and limits on possibility; that is, they make it possible to act in the world while simultaneously defining the "horizon of the taken-for-granted" (Hall 1988: 44) that marks the boundaries of common sense and acceptable knowledge« (Weldes et al 1999: 17). In this sense, my study is about generating insights into the possibilities that the HR's strategic assessment opens and closes.

Through an analysis that follows the premises of a social scientific reconstructive approach – and applies a combination of political language, content, and text analytical research strategies – my study generates a set of ten observations about the constructed 'European security'. These range from insights into the distinct nature of the challenges that the EU is facing, to the discovery that there is no 'existential threat', and the importance of 'regions' as a guiding organisational category. Grounded in these empirical observations, I identify five characteristics of the construction of 'European security' in the document *The European Union in a changing global environment*:

1. The construction of 'European security' constitutes a radical opening of conventions and conventional knowledge.
2. It conserves and reproduces existing EU-frames and institutions.
3. It politicises the issue of 'security'.
4. It is shaped by modern premises.
5. It privileges and produces security actors who are flexible, pro-active, adjustable, effective and efficient and, importantly, who hold regional and contextualised knowledge.

My study concludes with a discussion of these insights, and a positioning of itself as the empirical ground for the development of new research questions and studies of the forthcoming *EU Global Strategy*.

## 2. Background: Towards the EU Global Strategy

In 2013 the European Council (EC) invited the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to assess »the impact of changes in the global environment, and to report to the Council in the course of 2015 on the challenges and opportunities arising for the Union, following consultations with the Member States« (European Council 2013: 5). In June 2015 HR Mogherini presented her assessment, entitled *The European Union in a changing global environment: A more connected, contested and complex world* (EU 2015), to the EC. On the basis of this assessment, the EC concluded the HR would »continue the process of strategic reflection with a view to preparing an EU global strategy on foreign and security policy in close cooperation with Member States« (European Council 2015: 5). This new *EU Global Strategy* is to be submitted by June 2016.

The development of the strategic assessment of *The European Union in a changing global environment* as the basis for the EC's decision to ask the HR to develop an *EU Global Strategy* was a collaborative exercise that took place over the first six months of 2015. At its heart was »an informal working group, including representatives from the European External Action Service, the European Commission, the Council Secretariat and the European Council« (Tocci 2015: 119). This group reached out widely. Although, as they explain, time constraints prohibited them from engaging »deeply« with the wider foreign policy community, they involved an array of official EU actors and agencies such as the EEAS Secretary General and Senior Management, representatives of the Commission, member states, policy planners, the Political and Security Committee and the Committee of Permanent Representatives in the EU (see ibid.). This collaborative way of developing the strategic assessment was seen as an opportunity to find »a working method: a trial-and-error run to see what worked and what did not, allowing the HR/VP to recalibrate the process for« the development of the *EU Global Strategy* by mid-2016 (ibid.).

The strategic document *The European Union in a changing global environment* is set as the foundation for the development of the *EU Global Strategy*. In addition, as the EU's Institute for Security Studies (EUISS) – endowed by the HR – informs, there are two other documents which are »most likely to represent a key point of reference for the forthcoming 'global strategy'« (Missiroli 2015: 10). These are NATO's 'Strategic Concept' (NATO 2010) and the 2015 US National Security Strategy (White House 2015). The 2003 European Security Strategy *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy* (ESS 2003) is listed by Missiroli as a third important point of reference.

A look at the public communication of the HR and her team suggests that they have four distinct hopes and expectations for the *EU Global Strategy* and the process of its development.

### a. Consultative project beyond narrow policy circles

The development of the *EU Global Strategy* is envisaged by HR Mogherini and her team to be a consultative process that brings out »a living document« that will have to be »constantly updated trough time« (Mogherini 2015a). Importantly, they stress that the process through which the document is planned to be produced is designed to open »up beyond the circles of the foreign policy community and get everybody involved« (ibid.).

> I want a strategy that responds to the ideas, the fears, and even the dreams of the European citizens, the young and the older generations,

explains Mogherini (ibid.). In this vein, the expectation is that the *EU Global Strategy* will be more than a relatively general guiding high-level policy document.

> We do not want to simply receive input or papers – they are welcome, they are more than welcome. But we want to work together on a common *vision* for our common European role in the world (ibid; emphasis added)

### b. Identity building project

The extracted quote, immediately above, indicates a second central expectation the HR and her team seem to have for the *EU Global Strategy.* The document and the process of its development are envisaged as an identity-building exercise. Mogherini (2015a) stresses that the *EU Global Strategy* is

> not only about foreign policy, it is not only about our role in the World, but it can be and must be very much about us, about Europe, about who we are, how we work together, what as Europeans we share in terms on common foreign and security policy. It is about making a European public opinion on foreign policy and security policy emerge.

As one of her advisors puts it, »the primary purpose of an 'external' strategy is actually internal« (Tocci 2015: 116). Similar to the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS 2003), which was developed at a time of deep division between member states over the war in Iraq, the 2016 *EU Global Strategy* is envisaged by the HR as being about integration and identity building. Importantly, however, and in contrast to the 2003 ESS, the »internal« does not only refer to member states (governments) but to Europeans more broadly. The new *EU Global Strategy* provides »a chance to show that Europe matters to its citizens«, explains Mogherini (2015a).

### c. Concrete ideas about (future) policy instruments

Overall, the HR's expectation for public deliberation about the *EU Global Strategy* is that it will generate suggestions »about policy instruments […] tailored to specific goals« (Tocci 2015: 119).

> [I]n the strategy there should not be a general plea for more defence spending, but perhaps a more specific recommendation as to which capabilities are needed in pursuit

of specific goals,

explains Tocci (ibid.). And Mogherini (2015a) cautions,

> [t]he Strategy cannot just list the current crises and explain our relevant policies. This would not be a strategy, this would be a state of play, this would be a collection of Council conclusions. Strategy needs to provide a direction for the future, to tackle future crises and to prevent new ones.

### d. *Four principles*

There are four principles that the HR expects to play a role in the *EU Global Strategy.* The first principle, which is to inform the development of the *EU Global Strategy,* is already implied in its name: the *Strategy* is meant to be 'global', where 'global' is not used in a geographical sense but refers to the comprehensiveness of the combination and use of existing EU external action instruments (see Mogherini 2015a). Furthermore, the HR makes explicit that she would like to see »reflected in the strategy« the following three »key ideas«: engagement, responsibility, and »hard work and partnership« (Mogherini 2015a).

## 3. Theoretical premises: The constructed nature of social reality

There is something curious about the process of the development of the new *EU Global Strategy*. On the one side, the strategic document *The European Union in a changing global environment,* in which Mogherini and her team provide a picture of the state of the world and the threats and challenges the EU is facing, is accredited with a central role in the development of the *EU Global Strategy*. It is seen by the team »as the groundwork upon which a strategy is built«, as setting »guidelines and objectives for the ensuing strategy« (Tocci 2015: 119). On the other side, the development of this »snapshot of what the world looks like and what this means for the EU« (ibid.) is not itself considered part of the public and inclusive deliberation about the new *EU Global Strategy*. As Tocci (ibid.) explains, the first phase in the development of the *Global Strategy*, in which the strategic assessment of *The European Union in a changing global environment* was written, had the purpose of »clear[ing] the ground through the systematic sifting and assessment of aspects of mapping and analysis that would have otherwise made their way into the strategy itself« (ibid.). The strategic assessment laid out in *The European Union in a changing global environment* is seen by Mogherini and her team as »the *description* that precedes the *prescription*« (ibid.; emphasis added).

My study starts on the premise that the strategic assessment of the »more connected, contested and complex world« (EU 2015), in which the EU is (perceived to be) situated, is not simply a description of the world. Like all texts it is part of the re-production of the social world in that it makes this world meaningful. Social reality does not exist 'as such' and 'out there' but is re-produced through practices and through language, where language is not to be understood »as a transparent, reflective form of communication,

but as a situated, interpretable phenomenon that serves to construct social reality« (Ainsworth and Hardy 2004: 155). As Alexander Wendt (1992: 396-7; emphasis added) puts it, »people act toward objects, including other actors, on the basis of the *meanings* that the objects have for them. States act differently toward enemies than they do toward friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not.« Adding to this and pushing it further, texts, such as *The European Union in a changing global environment,* constitute historical instances that »systematically form the objects of which they speak« (Foucault 1972: 49). They do not just mirror or describe a text-external reality but play into the re-production of this reality, which then entails political possibilities. The web of meanings that is re-produced in *The European Union in a changing global environment* has »concrete and significant, material effects. [It] allocate[s] social capacities and resources and make[s] practices possible« (Weldes et al 1999: 16-7). It brings out and constitutes »interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others« (Doty 1993: 298). Hence, the text *The European Union in a changing global environment* opens and closes pathways as it constructs social facts, such as who is a desirable security actor, what are the EU's interests and what are its threats. As Weldes et al (1999: 17) explain with reference to Stuart Hall,

> [c]onstructions of reality and codes of intelligibility out of which they are produced provide both conditions of possibility and limits on possibility; that is, they make it possible to act in the world while simultaneously defining the "horizon of the taken-for-granted" (Hall 1988: 44) that marks the boundaries of common sense and acceptable knowledge.

The text *The European Union in a changing global environment* is of course only one of countless interwoven and interplaying linguistic components that together with practices constitute the construction and re-production of the social world. Yet, it holds a privileged and, in this sense, influential position due to its author and the role it is explicitly ascribed with as the reference point in the public deliberation about the *EU Global Strategy*. As such, it is worth critically reflecting on the text as an influential discursive moment. In general, how does the web of meanings – which we can call 'European security' – look that is constructed in the document? In particular, how does the subject look that is to be secured (the collective self), and what is the object in the face of which it is to be secured (threats, dangers)? Wæver (2005) and Weldes et al (1999) consider these two latter aspects as constitutive for the construction of the social reality 'security'. In sum, which »interpretive dispositions« (Doty 1993: 298) does the text hold? Which possibilities does it open, and which does it rule out?

## 4. Approach and method

In general, my effort to generate insights into this web of meanings constructed in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* is shaped by the premises that Franke and Roos (2013) capture under the label 'social scientific reconstruction'. These are a). the conviction that abduction forms a triangle with

deduction and induction and that the »reconciliation between the genesis and the verification of hypotheses are two equal elements of the same analytical process« (ibid. 21; my translation); b). the recognition of the principle of fallibility (ibid. 23); c). a principle openness to a pluralism of methods (ibid. 22); and d). the necessity of a »willingness on the side of the researchers to lay open the rules that guide their professional action« (ibid. 23; my translation).[1]

In particular, my strategy is to 'decipher senses' in traces of linguistic signs by detecting patterns in the text *The European Union in a changing global environment* through the re-organisation of the content of the text. I do this through a cyclic process of coding – in a way that is similar to what Mayring (2010: 13) describes as 'category-guided text analyses' – with »flexible« codes and categories (Schreier 2013: 171). In the course of this process of codification I gradually 'move away' from the text, I decouple from it, re-organise statements and, eventually, generate a picture of 'European security' (see further Flick 1995: 196; 218; also Wagner 2003; Baumann 2005).

In focusing on the interwoven meanings of the subject that is to be secured (the collective self) and the object in the face of which it is to be secured (threats, dangers) I am guided by six broad questions. These are not questions for me to answer in this study but signposts that guide my analysis: What kind of security actor is the EU? Which characteristics does it have? Where and how is it positioned in the world? What is threatening the EU? What other security actors are there in the world? How is the world imagined?

The actual process of 'deciphering' and coding is shaped by my pre-knowledge of political language and content and text analytical research strategies (e.g. Girnth 2002; Fairclough 2001; Schwarz-Friesel and Consten 2014; Mayring 2010; Schreier 2013). Given this personal pre-condition, my initial entry 'into the field' is via the study of *how* things are said in the text. Yet, my focus on linguistic specificities only serves to reach *semantic* insights. It is a means to an end, not an end in itself.

Given that the 2015 US National Security Strategy (NSS 2015) and the 2003 European Security Strategy *A Secure Europe in a Better World* (ESS 2003) are considered important in the process of the development of the *EU Global Strategy,* I take these two texts as points of reference that help me to identify particularities in *The European Union in a changing global environment.*


## 5. Ten observations

Ten observations arise from the analysis.

### 1. A different world

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[1] For a distinction between 'reconstruction' and 'interpretation', as well as 'discourse analysis', see Franke and Roos (2013: 15-18). See also their discussion of 'relativity' and 'subjectivity' (ibid., 17-22).

The first noteworthy observation that the analysis of the document *The European Union in a changing global environment* brings out is a distinct historical positioning of the presented world. On the one side, a sense of historical continuity is constructed. The world that is re-produced in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* is »*more* connected«, »*more* complex«, »*more* contested«. The word *more* indicates 'difference in degree', rather than 'difference in kind'. It links the now with the past, indicating meaningful change but not a *radical* break. On the other side, there *is* a radical and explicit break with the past, namely with the world of the ESS 2003. This break is made explicit at the beginning of the document. Its first sentence is: »Since the 2003 Security Strategy, the EU's strategic environment has changed radically« (EU 2015: 123). The world of *The European Union in a changing global environment* is no longer »a post-Cold War environment« but a world of »21st century realities« (EU 2015: 145). This break with the world of the ESS 2003 is remarkable because, in an explicitly different world, the status of historical knowledge and 'lessons learned' is precarious. In a world that is 'different in kind' historical knowledge loses legitimacy (see further Selchow 2013).

## 2. A complex world

The second noteworthy observation is that it is a »complex« world, in which the EU finds itself. »21st century realities« (EU 2015: 145) are complex realities. In the ESS 2003 the adjective *complex* plays only a marginal role. As illustrated in Figure 1 it is used only three times, namely to modify the words *problems* (2x) and *causes* (1x)*.* In *The European Union in a changing global environment,* in comparison, it is more prominent. It is applied five times as often as in the ESS 2003. It is used to modify the words *world/environment* (14x) and the noun *interdependence* (1x)*.* This is remarkable because it is here the very environment, in which the EU exists that is »complex«, not, as is the case in the ESS 2003, distinct 'problems' or 'causes' that the Union is facing. This means that complexity runs through everything. It is not just a feature of a distinct situation, case, or problem but the very state of the world.
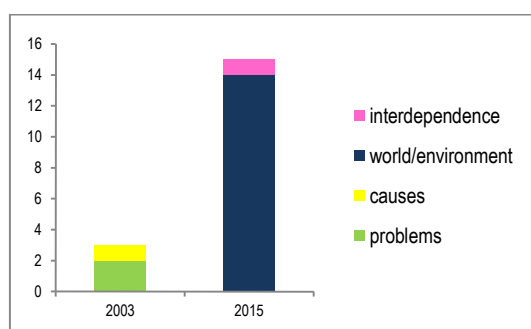


Figure 1: Collocations of the adjective *complex*; total number of word uses

The complexity of the world, which is the key characteristic of the »21$^{st}$ century realities«, implies four things. First, established institutions are not able to deal with the new realities.

> While the **UN** remains the principal guarantor of the sovereign equality among states, the composition of its Security Council and the distribution of voting rights in the International Financial Institutions no longer reflect current realities. The **World Trade Organisation** has grown in membership (and thus legitimacy) but not in ability to achieve consensus or advance multilateral trade liberalisation. The **G20** has emerged as a major informal forum, reflecting global power realignments. But while it played a key role in short-term crisis management during the 2008 financial crisis, it has failed so far to tackle structural global challenges in economic growth, financial markets and development. No effective global institutions are in place to confront [..] pressing challenges such as migration, cyber security, arms control or natural resource management. (EU 2015: 138; emphasis added)

Second, there are shortcomings, if not failures in existing concepts, such as 'borders' or 'polarity'. These concepts might have worked in the »post-Cold War era« but fall short in the new reality.

> The world system is no longer bipolar, unipolar or even multipolar: the very notion of 'polarity' is in question (ibid., 136)

The complexity of the world also implies the irrelevance of the clear distinction between 'internal' and 'external'. This is the distinction that underpinned and made the 'international' world possible. The fundamentally different state of the world demands concrete engagements, such as »enhancing the coherence between internal and external security policies« (ibid., 140), »the need to develop synergies between internal and external security policies« (ibid., 150), the tackling of »intertwined internal and external security challenges« (ibid., 145), the integration of » the external and internal dimensions of migration management« (ibid., 126), and addressing » the immediate challenges in [the EU's] South by sharpening its tools in the internal-external security nexus« (ibid., 125).

Third, established (political) theories no longer necessarily help grasp the world. They are not able to explain causal relations and paradoxes:

> Across all continents, emerging powers are rising in global rankings, but they are unlikely to form a single and cohesive bloc. Moreover, different regions display different configurations of power, while globally power is diffusing beyond the nation state towards a network of state, non-state, inter-state and transnational actors. Traditional multilateralism is losing steam as emerging countries want to reform the post-World War II architecture – yet opposing existing global governance mechanisms has been easier than creating new ones. (ibid., 124)

In fact, there is not even a normative centre. It is not only that the »complex« world and its guiding categories and concepts are no longer familiar, but it is also not clear who sets the rules to begin with:

> We know that variable geometries of state and non-state actors will shape the world in new ways. What we do not know are the rules of global interaction and *who will set them*. The global power shift and power diffusion are challenging traditional multilateralism. (ibid., 138; emphasis added)

Finally, in this »complex«world, networks of meaning, which used to be conventionally separated, are enmeshed. This is apparent for instance in the following quote:

> A surge in human mobility – from *tourists* to *terrorists*, from *students* to *refugees* – compels us to change how we think about migration, citizenship, health and development. (ibid., 128-9; emphasis added)

The bringing together of the words *tourists* with *terrorist* and *students* with *refugees* breaks down discursive boundaries. Social actors who, conventionally, have been 'at home' in different discourses are combined under the label »human mobility« (ibid.), where »human mobility« in all its facets is a constitutional feature of the new »complex« world, that is, of the complexity of »21st century realities«. This normalises and, in some sense, de-securitises 'terrorists' and 'refugees'. Both are a natural part of the »more connected, contested and complex world«.

### 3. Security actors and power

The »complex« world of »21$^{st}$ century realities« is a world of an extended group of security actors. This is because of a diffusion of power that is characteristic for the world:

> We live in an age of power shifts at a global level and power diffusion at all levels – away from governments and towards markets, media, civil (and less civil) societies and individuals. (ibid., 135; emphasis added)

However it is not only that power shifts from actors to actors. It is actually a world in which power, as we know it, no longer exists. Power is no longer readily identifiable as it »no longer resides within actors but circulates among them« (ibid., 136).

The diffusion of power means that it is not one state or a block of states that dominates the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«. So, while the US does have »a pivotal position to shape the world« (ibid., 135), while China is »[p]rime amongst the 'new' powers« (ibid.), and while the EU »is set to retain one of the highest per capita incomes in the world […] and has all the means to be an influential global player in future« (ibid.), none of them will dominate the scene.

> The combined effect of rising literacy, jobs and disposable incomes, along with the accelerating rate of technological progress, is expanding the number of stakeholders in world affairs. (ibid.)

### 4. 'Threat'-language

In general, the language of *threats*, *dangers* and (recently) *risks* is a prominent feature of discussions of 'security' (e.g. Selchow, 2014). In *The European Union in a changing global environment* this language plays only a marginal role. This is apparent especially in comparison to the ESS 2003. As illustrated in Figures 2 and 3, the use of word such as *threat/s, challenge/s, danger/s* and *risk/s* is relatively low. At least, it is significantly lower than in the ESS 2003.
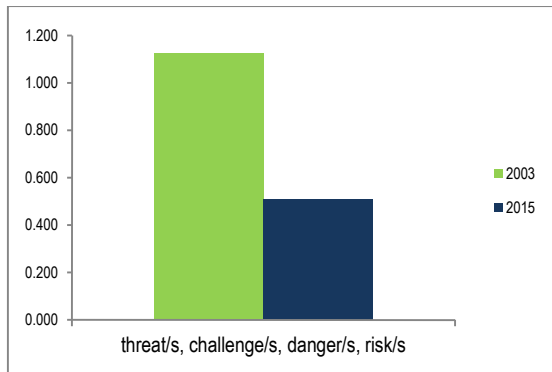
Figure 2: Use of 'threat'-language; relative to the total number of words in the document
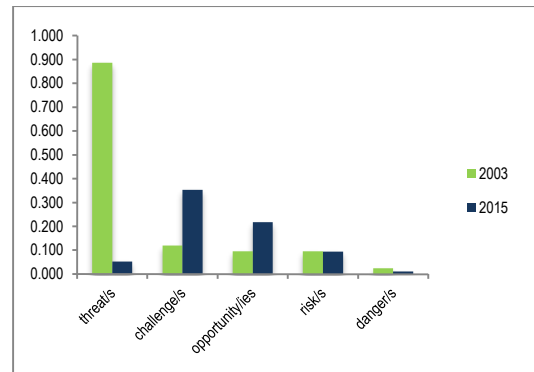
Figure 3: Use of 'threat'-vocabulary; relative to total number of words in the document

## 5. Challenges and opportunities - and no existential threat

The previous point is closely interlinked with the fifth observation. While the use of *threat/s, danger/s* and *risk/s* is relatively marginal, the use of the words *challenge/s* and *opportunit/ies* is more prominent. Figure 4, which compares the total number of uses of these words in the ESS 2003 and *The European Union in a changing global environment* illustrates this point.
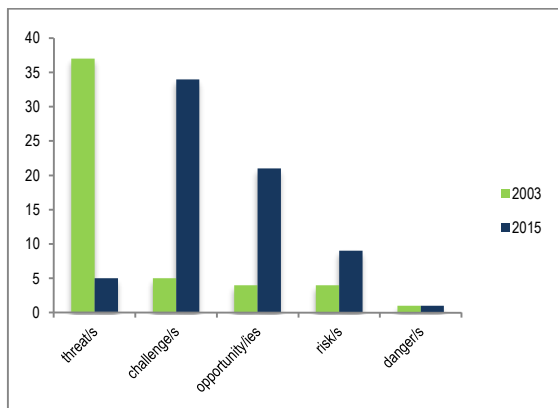


Figure 4: Use of 'threat'-vocabulary; total number of word uses

Two aspects are noteworthy in this context:

First, the »complex« world of »21st century realities« is a world in which there is no 'existential threat' that threatens but also, ultimately, establishes the EU. This is remarkable because the idea of an existential threat has always been key to the idea of (state) security. This observation goes hand in hand with the fact that the EU does not find itself in any kind of 'state of exception'. Rather, the world of the »21st century realities« is a world that is shaped by an essential 'state of contest' between a complex and moving set of actors and power constellations. In this respect, the world of *The European Union in a changing global environment* is similar to the world of the NSS 2015, which is the first US NSS that does not feature an 'existential threat'.

Second, the language of *challenge/s* and *opportunit/ies* is a language of 'choice' and 'priorities'.

> An effective response hinges on the European Union's ability to make choices and prioritise areas where it can and wants to make a difference (EU 2015: 143)

It brings out political actors in general and the EU in particular, which are (required to be) flexible and set their own priorities. Security measures and actions are not determined by an outsider that threatens the very existence of the political unit of the EU but by internal priorities, by where and how the EU »*wants* to make a difference«.

We see in Figure 4 that the language of 'challenges' and 'opportunities' is less prominent in the ESS 2003. Again, in this respect, *The European Union in a changing global environment* is similar to the NSS 2015. Here, challenges and the »seizing of opportunities« (White House, 2015: preface) play an important role. It is part of a market language, with which the world is grasped in the NSS 2015, the language of the entrepreneurs, which is about »investments« and »smart« moves in a »young century« (ibid., 1) that is full of opportunities and chances for those who are »responsible« and »innovative«.

Overall, the EU's goal is to peacefully overcome the »21st century realities« as a historical moment in a trajectory towards »a new global order which reflects universal values and in which the interests of all stakeholders are respected within the confines of agreed rules« (EU 2015: 138).

## 6. Challenges to EU programmes and policies

There is something intriguing about the 'challenges' the EU is facing in the »complex« world of »21st century realities«. *The European Union in a changing global environment* speaks of »five sets of challenges« (listed in Table 1 below). The nature of these challenges can be captured in two points. First, they are the »regional manifestations« of the nature of the complex world of »21st century realities«. Second, they are challenges to existing EU programmes. In other words, they are not challenges to the (existence of the) EU as such but to the »major external action instruments and policies« that are already in place, such as the CFSP, the CSDP, the counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism measures, etc.

Table 1 compares the titles and subheadings of the relevant chapters in the ESS 2003 and in *The European Union in a changing global environment.* This comparative view shows that the world of the ESS 2003 is full of concrete *threats*, such as terrorism, proliferation of WMD etc. The world of *The European Union in a changing global environment,* in comparison, faces 'challenges' that are the regional manifestations of the »complex« 'new' world. These 'challenges' are challenges to existing measures and require an adjustment of them to »21st century realities«, i.e. they require a *re*-doubling of commitments, a *re*-thinking of approaches, a *re*-defining of relationships, etc. This distinguishes the world of *The European Union in a changing global environment* also

from the one in the NSS 2015, in which we find a concern about concrete 'challenges', such as the »persistent threat of terrorism« (White House 2015: 9), »the spread and use of WMD« (ibid., 11) and climate change (ibid., 12)

| ESS:<br><br>The Security Environment: Global Challenges and Key Threats | The European Union in a changing global environment:<br><br>Challenges and Opportunities for the EU |
| --- | --- |
| **Global Challenges**<br><br>**Key Threats**<br><br>• Terrorism<br>• Proliferation of WMD<br>• Regional conflicts<br>• State failure<br>• Organised crime | 1. Redoubling commitment to our European neighbours<br>2. Rethinking the EU's approach towards North Africa and the Middle East (MENA)<br>3. Redefining our relationships with Africa<br>4. Reviving Atlantic Partnerships<br>5. A round approach to Asia |

Table 1: Titles and subheadings of the sections that deal with 'threats'/'challenges' in the ESS 2003 and *The European Union in a changing global environment*

Two interlinked aspects are worth highlighting. First, in contrast to the threats of the world of the ESS 2003, challenges that exist in the world of the »21$^{st}$ century realities« are more complex and, by nature, more nebulous. This is because they are the regional manifestations of the »complex« new world. And yet, *because* they are the regional manifestations of the »complex« new world, they are grounded in a distinct context. They are essentially contextualised. In fact, they only exist in the context of distinct regions and social settings. There are no abstract 'global' threats but challenges that are the product of the interplay of the »complex« world with particular regional constellations and their distinct actors. For instance, climate change exists in the world of the »21$^{st}$ century realities« as a trigger of regional conflicts, not as an external or 'global' threat to the EU as such (EU 2015: 126).

### 7. 'Regions' as a guiding category

'Region' is the guiding organisational category in the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«. While the world of the ESS 2003 consists mainly of nation-states, the post »post Cold War«-world consists of 'regions', in which, as we have seen above, challenges for the EU arise, take their form and play out in distinct ways. In themselves, these regions are complex and dynamic. »Power configurations change across time and place, making regions themselves dynamic concepts« (EU 2015: 136). Other guiding concepts of the political geography of the »complex« new world are 'fragile states' and 'ungoverned spaces'.

As suggested above, the focus on regions grasps the complexity of challenges and, at the same time, makes them 'identifiable'. They have a clear place; they can be located. In *The European Union in a changing global environment* this is manifested when the document refers to concrete and recent dynamics, and specific incidents, such as when

Russia »has actively destabilised some of [the EU's eastern neighbours] by undermining their freedom, sovereignty« (ibid., 132).

The prominence of 'regions' as an organisational category puts the spotlight on issues such as 'identity' and 'ideology' as drivers of conflict (e.g. ibid.) and naturalises different actors as playing a role in the political world in general, and in relation to the EU in particular, including those involved in the »crisis of unprecedented magnitude [that] has broken out inside the Sunni world, revolving around different interpretations of political Islam« (ibid.).

The world of 'regions' together with the conviction that the EU's »[i]nterests [are] dictated by geography« (ibid., 128), grounds the EU in the world and, especially, in its neighbourhood. At the same time, it constructs the EU as an island. The geographical compartmentalisation of the world into 'regions' draws a clear line around the EU, which is seen as being »surrounded by an arc of instability« (EU 2015: 123). This distances the EU from the complex, contested and connected world, which is 'out there'. Despite the fact that the internal/external-dichotomy fails in the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities« the EU is strangely distanced and contained from the developments that surrounds it.


## 8. Webs

Besides 'regions', a second noteworthy organisational category is 'webs'.

> We live in a world of overlapping webs. (EU 2015: 145)

> The exponential spread of webs not only opens opportunities for political participation,
> it also favours economic and financial crime, terrorism and trafficking. (ibid., 123)

In this respect, the world in *The European Union in a changing global environment* is similar to the one in the NSS 2015. Here, the world has a distinct geography of »shared spaces« (White House, 2015: 7). These are »cyber, space, air, and oceans« (ibid.). These »shared spaces«, which have not existed in the NSS 2010 (White House 2010), are a crucial and facilitating feature of the world in that they enable »the free flow of people, goods, services, and ideas« (White House, 2015: 7). They are nothing less than the »arteries of the global economy and civil society« (ibid.). As the biological metaphor indicates they are of existential importance. In this sense, they are a common good that is to be protected by all against »dangerous behaviors of some [which] threatens us all« (ibid.). Their protection is a central US national interest and, at the same time, a task, which serves our »common humanity« (ibid.).

In addition, in the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«, as constructed in *The European Union in a changing global environment*, Big Data, data mining, cloud computing and the Internet of Things are acknowledged as influential drivers of change. They are identified as shaping not only the pace of how we live but also the nature of our very existence. This relates to both the civil and military sector. In the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities« Big Data, data mining, cloud computing and the Internet of Things shape the »contours

of how we live, work and consume« (EU 2015: 130), and they revolutionise »the defence industry and may open new avenues for crisis management« (ibid., 134).

## 9. The EU

The EU is by nature uniquely positioned and equipped to deal with the »complex« world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«.

> The very nature of the EU as a construct of intertwined polities gives us a unique advantage to help steer the way in a more complex, more connected but also more contested world. (EU 2015: 128)

This is because the nature of the EU mirrors the new world. It is itself the product of the complex processes that shape »21$^{st}$ century realities«. As such, the EU is ideally and uniquely positioned to be successful in this new world. This, in turn, implies the imperative to secure and foster the very nature of the (integrated) EU. European integration becomes an explicit foreign policy and security strategy. Yet, acting as a united and coordinated global security player does not imply »only […] speaking with one voice, there is a need for a multitude of voices speaking in unison« (EU 2015: 147).

Overall, crises are an engine for EU integration as a quality, a factor that strengthens the EU's position as a global actor.

> The political economy of defence, coupled with security crises beyond the EU's borders, could lead to deeper cooperation between Member States, and thereby boost the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). This, in turn, would help bolster partnerships with the UN, NATO and regional organisations. (ibid., 131)

Key to the EU's external engagement is diplomacy. »Far from being a luxury, diplomacy can be a powerful multiplier of influence, thus realising the full potential of the EU's external action« (ibid., 149). Overall, it is a »joined-up approach« (ibid., 147) to conflicts and regional challenges that is the way for the EU to go, an approach that is »proactive rather than reactive« and combines »early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and peacebuilding in a coherent whole. This, in turn, is to be connected to long-term state-building and development efforts« (ibid.). The comprehensiveness of this approach is due to the combination of all existing EU tools but also in its proactive character that intends to actively 'intervene into' the future. »We may not fully know our future, but we can shape it« (ibid., 128).

Intriguingly, while the distinct, integrated nature of the EU constitutes the foundation of its strength in the world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«, its external approach is guided by 'international thinking', at the heart of which is the idea of the nation-state as the guarantor of peace. It is the failing of the nation-state that accounts for the spread of identity politics, that causes conflict and that leads to »a more dangerous world« (ibid., 130). Hence, it is the nation-state that is to be strengthened around the world in general and in the EU's neighbourhood in particular.

> Beyond the imperative of fostering democracy, human rights (including the rights of minorities) and good governance, the conflict over Ukraine underlines the need to

bolster the statehood prerogatives of our neighbours. These include recognised and protected borders, a sustainable fiscal capacity, as well as functioning customs services and police and military forces (ibid., 132)

## 10. Agency and responsibility

Agency plays an important role in the world of »21st century realities«.

> [G]lobal trends are neither linear nor preordained, but often the product of shocks and *human choices*. This highlights the uncertainty that lies ahead, but also the role of agency – including that of the EU – in moving forward. We may not fully know our future, but we can shape it. (EU 2015: 128; emphasis added)

As we have seen above, EU external engagements are not subject to 'natural' and historically grounded commitments but the product of concrete political decisions about priorities in view of what is useful, efficient and effective – in view of what the EU *wants*.

But it is not only the EU which is a security agent. Agency is explicitly ascribed to other actors. On the one side, this refers to actors whose 'human choices' shape 'global trends'. In the world of *The European Union in a changing global environment* they take an explicit position on the global political stage. On the other side, it refers to citizens, to Europeans more generally who are demanded to become active 'security' agents in the face of »the growing need for Europeans to take responsibility for their own security« (ibid., 145). This is captured in the notion of 'resilience', which is implied in the idea that, in addition to »human choices«, it is »*shocks*« that shape 'global trends'.[2]

Inevitably, the comprehensive idea of agency ascribes a central role to the notion of responsibility. Where there are 'human choices' there is 'responsibility'. This in turn privileges legal meanings above others. The world of *The European Union in a changing global environment* is similar in this respect to the world in the NSS 2015. Here, too, responsibility is a guiding concept, and legal language plays a prominent role.

## 6. Radical openings and a conservation of EU institutions, privileging modern premises

Bringing together and digesting these empirical observations, the construction of 'European security' in the document *The European Union in a changing global environment* can be captured in five points.

First, the construction of 'European security' opens paths beyond conceptual conventions and knowledge (production). It opens the space for challenges of conventional discursive boundaries (such as the conventional discursive 'compartmentalisation' and 'separation' of 'terrorists' and 'tourists') and the exploration of new discursive enmeshments. As such, it holds the possibility for a re-imagination of the political world and the development of new epistemologies. *The*

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[2] For an analysis and discussion of *resilience* and *resilient* in the US NSS 2010, see Selchow 2016.

*European Union in a changing global environment* opens possibilities to challenge, rewrite and replace guiding socio-political concepts, such as 'power', 'borders', 'inside/outside'.

Closely interlinked with the above, and taking inspiration from how 'politicisation' is understood in Beck and Lau (2004), the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* can be seen as a politicisation of 'security'. It constitutes a politicisation of 'security' in that it demands explicit decisions. It demands explicit decisions in regard to what to do, what is wanted and perceived as useful and efficient, and who to engage with. The construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* de-naturalises historical enmeshments and historically or ideologically legitimised imperatives. Not much of what used to be (perceived as) 'natural' is 'natural' in the »complex« world of »21$^{st}$ century realities«. Hence, 'European security', as constructed in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment,* requires political communication and negotiation.

Third, while opening the space to radically re-imagine the political world beyond conventional conceptions, the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* simultaneously conserves and re-produces existing EU-frames and institutions. In other words, the radical questioning of conventional concepts relates to the thinking of the state of the world 'as such' but excludes existing EU institutions. These are discursively 'protected' from questioning and potential re-writing through the construction of the EU as the mirror of the »complex« world and its »21$^{st}$ century realities«. The state of the EU and its institutions is further 'protected' through the construction of 'threats' as *'challenges'* to existing EU missions and institutional settings.

Furthermore, the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* is grounded in and re-produces a world of agency. Despite the fact that »21$^{st}$ century realities« are new and »complex« and, as such, bring into question many conventional socio-political conceptions, the idea of agency, as we know it, and in the face of uncertainty are not questioned. This is readily apparent in the earlier quoted conviction that »[w]e may not fully know our future, but we can shape it« (EU 2015: 128). This identifies the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* as committed to a modern approach to the world, the future and uncertainty. It adds to the above identified opening a 'modern boundary'. The potential opening is 'tamed' through modern premises.

Finally, and following from this last point, the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* privileges and brings out a distinct, desirable security behavior – namely one that is flexible, pro-active, adjustable, effective and efficient. This discursively opens the possibility for

terminologies, such as 'resilience', to turn into 'natural' security approaches and measures, and, with that, inevitably, re-produce distinct subjects, such as the »resilient subject« that Evans and Reid (2013) speak of. At the same time, given the distinct nature of EU challenges as the regional manifestations of »21$^{st}$ century realities«, the construction of 'European security' privileges and produces EU security actors who hold regional and contextualised knowledge. This is intriguing as it opens a path of change again, namely the possibility of challenging the very modern premises the construction of 'European security' in and through *The European Union in a changing global environment* conserves.

## 7. Conclusion and outlook

The aim of this study was to generate insights into the web of meanings, 'European security', that is re-produced in HR Mogherini's strategic assessment in *The European Union in a changing global environment.* Grounded in the theoretical premise that Mogherini's assessment is not simply a description of the state of the world but plays into the construction of social reality, the value of such an endeavour is to shed light on openings and closing of possibilities that the construction of 'European security' holds, and on »interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others« (Doty 1993: 298).

My systematic anlaysis generates a number of concrete insights. These range from insights into the distinct nature of the challenges that the EU is facing, to the discovery that there is no 'existential threat' and the importance of 'regions' as a guiding organisational category. Importantly, it finds an intriguing combination of openings and closings that the construction of 'European security' in *The European Union in a changing global environment* holds. On the one side, it holds the possibility of a radical re-thinking of conventional socio-political conceptions, such as 'power' and 'borders'. The world, as such, is opened up to be 're-thought'. On the other side, EU-institutions are discursively 'protected' and conserved as they are constructed as the mirror of the »complex« world and its »21$^{st}$ century realities«. Overall the possibilities and openings of *The European Union in a changing global environment* holds are somewhat 'tamed' through modern premises, privileging a distinct, desirable security behavior – namely one that is flexible, pro-active, adjustable, effective and efficient – and yet at the same time, grounded in contextual knowledge.

Albeit particularly influential as the express point of reference in the process of the development of the *EU Global Strategy*, *The European Union in a changing global environment* is only one aspect in the never ending social re-production of 'European security'. Other linguistic components – as well as practices – come into its re-production. In this sense, my study can be supplemented by similar studies of other aspects of the social construction of 'European security' and their interaction. In particular, my concrete empirical insights provide the ground for future studies into

where the identified openings have been taken up, or have been closed in the process of the development of the *EU Global Strategy,* and by whom and how. As such, my findings constitute the empirical ground, which enables future analyses of the politics of the development of the new *EU Global Strategy*.

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