

THE EUROPEAN UNION'S PRINCIPLES AND REALPOLITIK

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Are we really surprised by the way the EU's Foreign Policy Chief, High Representative Josep Borrell has been treated in Moscow? This is the culmination of member states' policies and how they deal with Russia. The name of this phenomenon that we see, not only internationally but also domestically, is impunity.

There was a time, however brief, when the EU had some clout on other countries. The post of High Representative was designed by the member states in order to improve the efficiency of the European Union's foreign policy. Yet the High Representative has had little or no clear instructions from member states. Nevertheless, the EU did achieve some success. An agreement between Serbia and Kosovo was realised, but this was due to the possibility of enlargement. This was soft power, as enlargement was an inducement for these two countries.

Another success came with the negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme. There, the High Representative was given some leeway, as the other countries involved did not want to get entangled with a possible failure.

The EU's influence is directly proportional to its adherence to its principles. Principles of upholding fundamental rights such as rule of law, freedom of speech and human rights. However, the EU has slowly lost ground on these points. The EU is having a difficult time dealing with Hungary and Poland. The latest example is with regards to the large financial infusion to meet the economic challenges of COVID-19, where the EU has had to bow down to these two countries' demands. The fact that its own members are moving towards authoritarianism peels off some of the EU's glitter.

The EU's recent trade deal with China does mention the rights of workers. The EU also criticizes China on its treatment of the Uighurs. But in reality, what really changes? Has China treated its population any different? Can the EU pressure China for revising its policies? Will China abide by its commitments, and if not, what can the EU do?

Relations with Turkey have turned transactional. The last two EU Summits criticized Turkey not because of any issue on fundamental rights, but with regards to events in

the Eastern Mediterranean. After years of procrastinating its candidacy, the EU approached Turkey in 2015 only because it needed to manage the massive migration flow.

The relationship with Russia is another case in point. The latest example is how opposition figure Navalny was treated on his way back to Russia. What guarantee is there for him? The EU cannot do anything about it. Russia did not wait for Mr. Borrell to return before expelling diplomats from three EU countries that participated in demonstrations for Navalny. Calls for stopping the Nord Stream II Pipeline gas from Russia to Germany over the Baltic Sea will probably not bear fruit. German and French leaders prefer to engage with Russia. Russia knows what really counts and therefore could afford to embarrass the High Representative.

The EU continues to condemn or criticize several countries that trample universal values while also continuing to deal with them. This is realpolitik, and is nothing new. What the EU is pursuing is no different from any other country's foreign policy. Interests override other concerns, and national interests overrule the EU's values.

The EU may satisfy its conscience that it makes the right pronouncements and statements. However, there should be no delusion that the EU is upholding these values, when in reality, engaging with the countries it criticizes does not bring any change. If the EU wishes to continue to be a shining example, then it has to abide by its own principles. This is the least it can do.