

*Future of European Foreign Policy Seminar**Biographical sketch***SVEN BISCOP 1976-**

If it is one's conviction that the future of European Foreign Policy lies with the people that will shape it, then Belgian Professor Sven Biscop holds some of the keys to that future. Even before the EU adopted the *European Security Strategy* (ESS) - the first ever common foreign strategic vision of the Member States - in December 2003, Biscop was urging for a more coherent and active European strategy with regards to security issues and his advice was also presented within the design process of the final strategy. He remains an active contributor to the following debate regarding *if* and *how* the ESS can form the basis of a comprehensive approach that integrates all dimensions of EU external action under the same agenda of "*effective multilateralism*". He represents a view that the EU *can* and *must* adopt a more proactive role within the international order and he is an academic contributor who never settles with pure academic analyses but who turns his analyses into specific policy recommendations.

Born in Willebroek, Belgium, in February 1976, Sven Biscop is the son of François Biscop and Flori Gillis.^[i] He early specialized in European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) during his master's studies in Political sciences at Ghent University (Belgium) from which he graduated in 1998. He himself explains his initial interest in European foreign policy as part of his Belgian heritage. According to him, most Belgians are more EU-minded than average which he believes is a function of Belgian history. If the great powers fought, they usually fought their wars on Belgian ground so Belgians have always had great incentives to have the European powers working together diplomatically.^[ii]

Biscop proved his academic writing skills early on by winning the best thesis award for his master's thesis on the integration of the Western European Union (WEU) in the European Union and on the development of a European security and defense identity.^[iii] Inspired both by this success and by his tutor, Professor *Dr. Marc Cogen*, Biscop chose to pursue an academic career and continued with studies at the doctorate level at Ghent University.^[iv] As he continued, he narrowed his field of specialization to the political economy of the Mediterranean region and to the Mediterranean security policy of the EU.^[v]

His doctoral thesis: "*From common interests to joint actions; The CFSP and Euro-Mediterranean security*" (2002), later published as "*Euro-Mediterranean Security: A Search for*

Partnership” (2003) is representative of Biscop’s main academic argument and of his writing style. It is so by both proving a detailed background of the security policy of the EU towards the Mediterranean while simultaneously concentrating on present issues and on specific policy recommendations.[vi] Through his writing, Biscop, who has always been politically active as well, clearly demonstrates his belief that academics should not just watch but should try to actively contribute to policy making.[vii]

The underlying hypothesis presented in his thesis is that the EU and its Mediterranean partners share important political and economic interests. These interests imply that any Euro-Mediterranean security policy should be based on a continuous dialogue between the parties and should not take the form of Europe protecting itself from the Mediterranean countries. Biscop suggests that the ESDP should instead be opened for participation by all Mediterranean partners. This would involve a role for the non-EU partners in planning, provision of military forces, and crisis management and would be aimed at alleviating the present distrust of the European countries. Biscop argues, contrary to the claims of certain more pessimistic observers, that this cooperation is possible because no direct security threat arises to the EU from the Mediterranean countries. According to him, the Mediterranean countries are dependent on a secure and economically strong Europe and the existing economic and political interdependence is too important for both parties.

Biscop argues however that there is still need for the Euro-Mediterranean security policy to include some elements of “hard” security. Without a hard security dimension in which the Union assumes responsibility for the maintenance of peace and stability in its periphery; the Mediterranean, the Union will never fully gain the trust of its Mediterranean partners, nor of the international community as a whole. If it does not gain this trust and does not show its credibility as an international actor, then there is little hope for the ambitious objectives and principles of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the ESDP. He thus proposes a complementary hard security dimension based on *political* imperatives rather than because of a Mediterranean security threat.[viii] To prove itself on the international arena, Biscop suggests that the EU resolutely claims its role as co-sponsor alongside the United States in achieving a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Whereas the US has leverage on Israel, the Union has far more leverage on the Palestinian side and can therefore make a positive difference needed as a mediator.

Critics of Biscop’s initial work focus on mainly two areas. Firstly, his argument has been criticized for overemphasizing the existence of shared interests of the EU and the Mediterranean and for underplaying the problems and differences between the EU member states and the Mediterranean partners, among the EU member states, and among the Mediterranean countries.[ix] He has also received critique for his strong belief in the EU’s capacity as a peace maker within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from, amongst others, C. Edward Dillery who has previously served as a U.S. Foreign Service officer. In Dillery’s view, the call for the Union to play a role equal to that of the United States in the Middle East peace process is somewhat unrealistic and might also be counterproductive as a stronger European support for Palestine may widen the divide between the Palestine and Israel.[x]

Biscop's critics unveil Biscop's profound belief in the *potential* capabilities of the EU as a unified external actor. While being critical of the EU's lack of initiative in its security policy, Biscop emphasizes the *possibility* of the Union to play an active role. This view contrasts more widespread voices in the debate that doubt that the EU can play a unified, important role within world security due to its internal political characteristics.^[xi] Biscop supports his belief in the EU as a potential influential actor by highlighting the ample attention devoted in the CFSP to human rights, democratization, economic development, dialogue between cultures etc. He has however devoted less attention to the importance of diverse domestic characteristics in EU member states.

After writing his doctoral thesis, Biscop joined the *Royal Institute for International Relations* (IRRI-KIIB), today called *Egmont– The Royal Institute for International Relations*. This think tank is associated with the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and exercises considerable influence on Belgian foreign policy. Only one month after Biscop joined, in December 2002, this institute initiated a strategic reflection on Europe's security policy at the request of the Belgian Foreign Ministry and Biscop was placed as one of the persons in charge of this report. The aim was to draft a European strategic concept in order to stimulate a strategic debate and to challenge the common view that a European strategic document was unfeasible. However, the project was given a sudden change of direction when, in early May 2003, the ministers of foreign affairs of the EU surprisingly tasked Dr. *Javier Solana*, the High Representative of the CFSP, with elaborating a strategic document. This initiative presented an unexpected avenue of influence for Biscop's team and they soon redirected their project to being the Belgian academic contribution to the broad debate to follow on the elaboration of the ESS. As Biscop puts it:

“Out of the blue, the strategic debate that we had hoped to stimulate was all over us. So far for our grand ambitions - which political scientist does not secretly hope to alter the course of history through his writings-...”

(Biscop 2005, *The European Security Strategy*: viii)

The result of the project; “*A European Security Concept for the 21st Century*” (Coolsaet and Biscop, 2004) was formally presented to Dr Solana and the former Belgian minister of Foreign Affairs, *Louis Michel*, at an IRRI-KIIB conference in November 2003. This conference was part of a series of seminars held to discuss the draft strategy during the fall of 2003 and that finally ended with the adoption of the ESS by the European Council in December 2003.

The ESS, as much as being an important milestone for European foreign policy, still faces many challenges for the years to come. Some of these major challenges were later identified by Biscop within his second book, *The European Security Strategy – A Global Agenda for Positive Power*, published in July 2005. Within this second piece, Biscop focused more clearly on the difficult birth of the CFSP in the wake of the break up of Yugoslavia and discussed the roles played by different organizations including the EU, NATO, and the OSCE in moving

towards a comprehensive concept of security. He then assessed the main elements of the ESS which seeks to analyze the nature of the threats facing the EU and the Union's various instruments to respond to a troubled new post 9/11 environment. Within this second book Biscop's argument had developed from his earlier work. He had now taken his belief in EU foreign policy capacities to including the promotion of a human rights-like agenda and focused on how the EU could step up to the corresponding responsibilities of being a true global actor. He argues forcefully for a greater EU effort to ensure that "effective multilateralism" do not remain empty words.[xii] The agenda that he proposes focuses on how a European foreign policy approach, emphasizing long-term stabilization and conflict prevention, can be an approach which promotes core public goods to which every individual is entitled. Rather than focusing on the military aspect alone, this approach takes into account all dimensions of security (political, socio-economic, cultural and ecological) and is based on the notion of *partnership* rather than *confrontation*. On that basis, the ESS can be a global agenda for *Positive Power*, for a Union with effective power to achieve positive objectives.[xiii]

In this book, Biscop also focuses more closely on the Union-specific challenges of a common foreign strategy, one of the fields that he was earlier criticized for neglecting. He argues that as a first step to surpass internal differences within the Union, the EU needs to improve its military and civilian capabilities and he recommends a drive for resource consolidation in this area.[xiv] In contrast to his first book, in which he settles with urging the EU to take a more active role within global security and conflict management, he now also extends this argument to the actions of the US.[xv] It is also within the transatlantic relation aspect of global security that Biscop has focused much of his research and policy advice since 2005. His later works emphasize the need for a Europe with an enhanced military capacity to reassess the transatlantic relationship. He now sees the relationship not only as a potential alley for cooperation but also for competition and increasingly discusses the rivalry between the ESDP and NATO. One of the quotes that most expressively state this concern is:

"Competition is the inevitable consequence of the functional and geographic overlap between the two organizations if the relationship between them does not take into account the structural shift in the transatlantic balance which increasing EU 'actorness' represents. A transformation with re-equilibration would help to diversify options and capabilities, and to maintain a unified western front in promulgating democratic ideals."

(Biscop 2006 "NATO, ESDP and the RIGA Summit :

No Transformation without Re-equilibration": 2 & 16)

Since October 2003, Sven Biscop is professor of European Security at Ghent University. He is the editor in chief of Egmont's journal *Studia Diplomatica*; member of the board of the Flemish United Nations Association; foreign languages book review editor of *European Foreign Affairs Review*; member of the editorial board of *Internationale Spectator* and member of the editorial board of the yearbook on international humanitarian law of the Red Cross – Flanders. He is also a member of the scientific committee of the Centre for Defence Studies of the Royal Defence College (Brussels) and fellow co-ordinator of the Royal Defence College's Higher Studies in Security and Defence, and he represents Egmont in the Executive Academic Board

of the EU's European Security and Defence College. If he continues to influence the debate on European Foreign Security at the same pace and vigor as he has until now, some of the answers to where the future of European Foreign policy is heading most definitely lie in his current and future research.

Anna Eriksson

[Back to homepage](#)

Selected Major Works

Theses

Biscop, Sven, Licenciaats' thesis: *Integratie van de WEU in de Europese Unie. Ontwikkeling van een Europese veiligheids- en defensie-identiteit*[xvi] (1998).

Biscop, Sven Ph. D. thesis: *From common interests to joint actions. The CFSP and Euro-Mediterranean security* (2002).

Books

Biscop, Sven, *De integratie van de WEU in de Europese Unie. Europa op weg naar een Europese defensie organisatie*[xvii], Leuven, Acco (2000).

Biscop, Sven, *Euro-Mediterranean security: a search for partnership*, Aldershot , Ashgate, (2003).

Biscop, Sven, *The European Security Strategy: A Global Agenda for a Positive Power*, Ashgate (2005).

Edited Books

Maesschalck, Jeroen, Sven Biscop & Veerle Van Vynckt (eds.), *'Naar een beter bestuur*[xviii] Liber amicorum Bob Van Hooland'. Ghent, Academia Press (2002).

Selected Papers

Biscop, Sven, *Audit of European Strategy*, Egmont Paper 3, (IRRI-KIIB), Brussels (2004).

Coolsaet, Rik and Biscop, Sven, *A European Security Concept for the 21st Century*. Egmont Paper 1, IRRI-KIIB, Brussels (2004).

Coolsaet, Rik and Biscop, Sven (eds.), "Core group, directoire, enhanced cooperation? Finding the key to an effective foreign and defence policy for Europe ", *Studia Diplomatica*, Vol. 55, No. 3, Brussel, IRRI-KIIB (2003).

Biscop, Sven: "The European Security Strategy Implementing a Distinctive approach to Security", Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels. Published by the Royal Defence College (IRSD-KHID), Brussels, '*Sécurité & Stratégie*', Paper No. 82, (2004).

Notes

[i] Biscop, Sven (2002), “From common interests to joint actions. The CFSP and Euro-Mediterranean security”: x

[ii] E-mail conversation with Sven Biscop 2007-03-21

[iii] Biscop, Sven, Licenciaats’ thesis: “Integratie van de WEU in de Europese Unie. Ontwikkeling van een Europese veiligheids- en defensie-identiteit” (1998)

[iv] Biscop, Sven (2002), “From common interests to joint actions. The CFSP and Euro-Mediterranean security”: ix

[v] He did during his PhD studies hold the Paul-Henri Spaak PhD scholarship of the Fund for Scientific Research – Flanders from 1999 to 2002

[vi] Biscop, Sven (2002), “From common interests to joint actions. The CFSP and Euro-Mediterranean security”: xv

[vii] E-mail conversation with Sven Biscop 2007-03-21

[viii] *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pg 693, May 2005

[ix] *West European Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3, pg 693, May 2005

[x] *Mediterranean Quarterly* 15.2 (2004) 112-114

[xi] An example being: Duke, Dr. Simon (2204), The Enlarged EU and the CFSP, Center for International Relations Reports & Analyses 5/04

[xii] Biscop, Sven (2005), “The European Security Strategy: A Global Agenda for a Positive Power”: 135

[xiii] Biscop, Sven (2004): “The European Security Strategy Implementing a Distinctive approach to Security”:30

[xiv] *The Conflict Prevention Partnership*. Book Review: The European Security Strategy, Sven Biscop, Ashgate, 2005, article by Fraser Cameron, EPC, 1 October 2005

[xv] Biscop, Sven (2006), Egmont Paper 11, “NATO, ESDP and the RIGA Summit : No Transformation without Re-equilibration”

[xvi] English translation: *“Integration of WEU in the European Union. Development of a European security and defence identity”*

[xvii] English translation: *“The integration of WEU into the European Union. Europe on the path to a European defence organization”*

[xviii] English translation: *“Towards a better government”*