

Becoming a ‘Spacifier’ – Why the European Union Needs a ‘Global Spaces’ Strategy and What it Could Look Like

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Executive Summary

> In an increasingly geopoliticised world, Global Spaces – the atmosphere, high seas, poles (Arctic, Antarctica), outer space, cyberspace – are crucial strategic theatres that pose comparable governance challenges and are prone to power competition.

> In its approach to the governance of such Spaces, the European Union (EU) is a latecomer that has primarily acted as a norm promoter, with limited success. Its vows to act ‘geopolitically’ to match the behaviour of more interest-oriented Great Powers like China, Russia and the United States have so far remained unfulfilled.

> In light of the growing significance of these Spaces and in order to become a more effective player in their governance, the EU should clarify its own foreign policy ambitions and develop a bespoke Global Spaces strategy.

> At the heart of such a strategy should feature the *leitmotif* of acting as a ‘spacifier’, that is, a ‘pacifier of Global Spaces’. A spacifier shows a principled commitment to protecting Global Spaces, ‘leaving them in peace’, while acknowledging Space-specific geopolitical constellations and pragmatically working with multiple others to appease the relations around these Spaces.

> Offering a ‘third way’ between the EU’s current, at times challenging norm promotion and its elusive quest for becoming a geopolitical Great Power, such a strategy would allow it to play to its strengths as a multilateralist and develop a unique position in the governance of Global Spaces. The implementation of such a strategy demands a stronger political buy-in of the EU’s member states and foreign policy elites.

Geopolitics is back in both practice and discourse. Concerned with the “effects on politics of the earth’s physical geography ... intimately associated with ... the ‘high’ politics of strategic foreign policies” of primarily “Great Powers”, it is in essence about the “deployment of power over space” (Agnew 2023, 18, 20). As a practice, geopolitics fuels antagonist tendencies, as Great Powers tend to seek domination. Russia’s ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine represents an emblematic example. Regarding discourse, it may well be the European Union (EU) that most vocally embraces the return of geopolitics. When taking office in 2019, Ursula von der Leyen vowed to preside over a ‘geopolitical Commission’. Since then, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Borrell has made consistent reference to the Union’s “geopolitical awakening” and piloted the 2022 ‘Strategic Compass’ aimed at increasing the EU’s material “capacity and willingness to act, strengthen[ing] [its] resilience” (European Union 2022, 10).

As geopolitics essentially embodies struggles for control over territorial and non-territorial space, its return contributes – alongside other trends such as environmental degradation processes and technological change – to bringing hitherto largely unappropriated physical and virtual spaces into the focus of political attention. Such ‘Global Spaces’ are areas that are largely beyond national jurisdiction and from which it is difficult to exclude others, i.e. the atmosphere, the high seas and deep seabed, the poles (Arctic, Antarctica), outer space, and the non-physical cyberspace (Brimmer 2016; Gstöhl and Larik 2023). They represent strategic theatres prone to power competition and in need of collaborative governance.

When it comes to governing these Spaces, the EU has, contrary to some of its member states, only recently stepped up its interest. The Strategic Compass diagnoses generally increased “strategic competition” that strongly manifests itself in these Spaces. It argues amongst others that “the high seas, air, outer space and the cyber sphere are increasingly contested domains” (European Union 2022, 14). To respond to these challenges, the EU has released, or substantially updated, policy documents on most Spaces (e.g. 2021 revised Arctic policy; 2023 updates of outer space and maritime security (and defence) strategies; 2023 cybersecurity strategy)

(see Gstöhl and Larik 2023). A characteristic feature of these efforts is that the EU's reaction to what it perceives as “attacks on the ‘global commons’” (European Union 2022, 5) is a ‘geopolitical’ one. It focuses on bolstering EU security capacities, enabling the Union to “learn ... speak[ing] the language of power” (European Union 2022, 6).

Given the importance of these Global Spaces as political seismographs of an increasingly geopolitical global context, scrutinising the EU's contribution to their governance allows for understanding its capacity to play a ‘geopolitical’ role in these Spaces and, possibly, beyond. Following a brief discussion of the geopolitics of Global Spaces, their governance, and how key ‘Great Powers’ – China, Russia and the United States (US) – have acted in them, this policy brief therefore empirically assesses to what extent and how the EU has been operating across these Global Spaces. Drawing on the insights of a recent interdisciplinary special issue published in the *Journal of European Integration* (vol. 45, issue 8, 2023), it finds that the EU has, beyond its general preference for norms promotion and some lip service to an underspecified ‘geopolitical’ stance, not yet displayed a clear-cut Global Spaces approach. A critique of this state of affairs then forms the basis for a normative argument in favour of designing a bespoke EU Global Spaces strategy. Built around the 2016 Global Strategy's idea of ‘principled pragmatism’, this strategy centres on the *leitmotif* of becoming a ‘spacifier’. It would allow the EU – rather than to engage in an impossible (and undesirable) mimicking of Great Power behaviour – to play to its strengths as a regional integration organisation built around law and diplomacy. The policy brief concludes by discussing the conditions needed to effectively implement this strategy.

Geopolitics and the governance of Global Spaces

This section briefly discusses how Global Spaces can be and have been governed, what ends have been defined in existing governance arrangements, enshrined in international law, and how their effectiveness has been impacted by Great Powers' strategic behaviour.

Control-seeking strategies regarding Global Spaces

To control Global Spaces, the “deployment of power” that is characteristic of geopolitics (Agnew 2023, 20), has classically taken two forms (Lambach 2022, 41): on the one hand, Great Powers have engaged in “sovereign territorialisation”, which essentially implied ‘planting their flag’ on hitherto unappropriated territories; on the other hand, they have engaged in attempts at “internationalisation” by concluding international treaties such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to collectively govern specific Global Spaces. In recent decades and in many cases, neither of these options proved conclusively successful. No state has been powerful enough to durably ‘plant its flag’, while growing interest-based antagonisms have rendered collective governance less promising.

Against this backdrop, and with more players involved in global governance, including regional actors such as the EU but also private-sector actors like tech giants operating inter alia in cyberspace and outer space, a third option has increasingly come into focus: “functional territorialisation”, that is, “the creation of territories which do not endow states with fully sovereign claims over space but limited rights and obligations” (Lambach 2022, 42). It “blends elements of the two classical options, namely the creation of spatially delimited state control rights and the origin of these rights in international regimes” (ibid.).

Current Global Spaces governance and its agreed aims

Control-seeking strategies for the five Global Spaces have, to varying degrees, relied on ‘internationalisation’ and ‘functional territorialisation’ (see Gstöhl and Larik 2023). In relation to the atmosphere, since the 1980s the global community has attempted to ‘internationalise’ its responses to the depletion of the ozone layer and climate change with the creation of international regimes around multilateral environmental agreements such as, on ozone, the Vienna Convention (1985), Montreal Protocol (1987) and subsequent amendments, and, on climate, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC 1992) and the Paris Agreement (2015). Similar attempts at internationalising the control over Global Spaces have been made in Antarctica, with the adoption of the 1959 Antarctic Treaty (and subsequent protocols) as well as regarding outer space (1967 Outer Space Treaty) and the high seas (1982 UNCLOS). The Arctic, despite witnessing ‘sovereign territorialisation’ attempts such as Russia's 2007 flag-planting on the North Pole seabed, has remained an area of ‘functional territorialisation’ via the work of the Arctic Council and multiple sectoral agreements (e.g. on fisheries, oil spills). Finally, cyberspace stays subject to varying attempts at ‘sovereign territorialisation’ (e.g. China's promotion of ‘cyber sovereignty’ and a separate Chinese internet) that clash with proposals for ‘functional territorialisation’ (e.g. 2004 Budapest Convention on Cybercrime).

Where they exist, governance arrangements have acknowledged (the risk of) geopolitical struggles and established varying degrees of collective control over the Global Spaces. Most of them state clear objectives of global collective action that recognise that these Spaces represent common concerns of humanity. These objectives provide the foundations for potentially effective cooperation:

1. *Atmosphere:*
 - *Climate change:* the goal of the UN climate regime is to prevent “dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (Art. 2 UNFCCC); the 2015 Paris Agreement has specified this aim by calling for limiting temperature increase to “well below” 2°C above pre-industrial levels and attaining net-zero emissions;
 - *Ozone:* the ozone regime aims to prevent “adverse effects resulting or likely to result from human activities

- which modify or are likely to modify the ozone layer” (Art. 2 Vienna Convention); subsequent agreements have mandated the phase-down (and -out) of various ozone-depleting substances;
2. *High Seas*: activities in the high seas “shall be reserved for peaceful purposes” (Art. 88 UNCLOS); specific sectoral targets have been negotiated, e.g. via the 2023 ‘Biodiversity beyond National Jurisdiction’ (BBNJ) Agreement, which foresees large-scale marine protected areas in the high seas;
 3. *Poles*:
 - *Antarctica*: the continent “shall be used for peaceful purposes only” (Art. I Antarctic Treaty); parties commit to “the comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment ... and ... designate Antarctica as a natural reserve” (Art. 2 Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty);
 - *Arctic*: parties creating the Arctic Council expressed their “commitment to the protection of the Arctic environment, ... maintenance of biodiversity in the Arctic region and conservation and sustainable use of natural resources” (1996 Ottawa Declaration on the Establishment of the Arctic Council);
 4. *Outer Space*: parties have committed to the “exploration and use of outer space ... for the benefit ... of all countries” and recognise outer space as “the province of all mankind” (Art. I Outer Space Treaty);
 5. *Cyberspace*: apart from the non-binding UN norms of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, no comprehensive regulatory regime exist, and no collective targets have been set yet.

The limited effectiveness of Global Spaces governance and the role of Great Powers

Despite these objectives, almost all of the Global Spaces suffer from implementation deficits (with the partial exception of the ozone and Antarctica regimes). This is primarily due to contestations of agreed international norms by Great Powers, whose commitment remains key to effective governance.

Great Powers like China, Russia and the US have indeed held the “command of the commons” as a strategic goal (Posen 2003) and have thus typically acted in pragmatically strategic and almost exclusively interest-based ways across the Global Spaces (see Gstöhl and Schunz 2023, 1245-1249). Though they may “promote cooperative forms of governance if this suits them”, and thus contribute to the above objectives, they “do not shy away from ... conflictual approaches if they consider them to be in their interest” (ibid., 1249). Illustrations of this “idiosyncratic” and “situational” behaviour (Freeman 2020, 3-4) include US governments’ oscillation between constructive (e.g. Clinton, Obama, Biden administrations) and destructive (Bush, Trump administrations) behaviour in global atmospheric governance; the instrumental use of Arctic governance fora by China, Russia and the US; the contestation of UNCLOS provisions by China (in relation to disputes around

the South China Sea) and Russia (around the Black Sea); and, in cyberspace, the generally antagonistic behaviour of Great Powers, epitomised by Russian cyber warfare.

As state actors, Great Powers can afford and implement such idiosyncratic approaches. Yet, in so doing, they are also co-responsible for the limited effectiveness of current Global Spaces governance arrangements, which encounter difficulties in attaining their objectives and maintaining peaceful relations. The EU, as a regional organisation and – according to its own representatives and observers – not a Great Power in a geopolitical sense, is prone to follow a different approach, which requires separate scrutiny.

The EU’s approach to Global Spaces: current patterns

The EU’s increasing attention to Global Spaces governance is visible in both its strategic rhetoric and practice. Rhetorically, across Global Spaces the EU “sees itself primarily as a defender of existing norms, notably with regard to international law and multilateral cooperation under UN auspices, while it also supports and at times initiates the creation of new norms” (e.g. in cyberspace) (Gstöhl and Schunz 2023, 1241). Recently, this focus on norms “has been complemented ... by a stronger interest orientation” (ibid.) and the desire for “a more permanent strategic posture” (European Union 2022, 4) regarding these Spaces. This is particularly observable in relation to the more recent, yet underregulated cyberspace, where a greater emphasis on threats than on opportunities has led the EU to focus on how to “prevent, ... deter and defend against cyberattacks aimed at the EU and its member states using all means available” (European Commission and High Representative 2022, 2).

In practice, across Global Spaces the EU’s “default approach” has, however, been about fostering “global cooperative action based on compliance with, and the development of, international law” (Gstöhl and Schunz 2023, 1242):

- Regarding the *atmosphere*, the EU has consistently worked for internationally legally binding solutions in the climate and ozone regimes. Since the Paris Agreement has defined a collective mitigation objective, the EU has turned to incentivising others to comply with that target by combining the promotion of this aim with more assertive – and arguably strategic – external action, aimed at enforcing compliance (see Schunz 2023).
- In the *high seas*, and despite increased attention to maritime security challenges, the EU has primarily been acting to uphold international law (e.g. on the freedom of navigation or by promoting the adoption of the BBNJ agreement).
- Regarding the *poles*, and here more actively vis-à-vis the Arctic, the EU has been attempting to contribute to a continued, cooperative ‘functional territorialisation’, consolidating the *status quo*.

- In *outerspace*, while trying to contribute to consolidating international space law, the EU has encountered challenges in asserting itself as an actor vis-à-vis established space nations like the US and Russia.
- In *cyberspace*, the EU tries to shape global cyber governance while protecting itself from cyber threats, which includes gearing up its defence capacities. It is here that the EU's strategic turn in rhetoric towards a more 'geopolitical' stance seems to so far have the most tangible practical consequences.

In synthesis, the EU's approach to Global Spaces has to date consisted of promoting norms to propel their 'internationalisation' or 'functional territorialisation', yet with varying success. Its rhetorical shift aimed at becoming 'more geopolitical' has, by contrast, not yet been consistently reflected in its action, even if traces of this adjustment can be detected primarily in relation to cyber governance. The next section elaborates on this observation to argue for a genuine EU Global Spaces strategy.

Towards an EU Global Spaces strategy

Against the backdrop of its current approach, this section reflects on the EU's future contribution to Global Spaces governance by arguing why it needs a Global Spaces strategy before discussing its possible *leitmotif* and key contours.

The need for a bespoke EU Global Spaces strategy

The EU's general approach to the five Global Spaces has been largely grounded in its identity as a promoter of "multilateral solutions to common problems", "an international system based on stronger multilateral cooperation and ... global governance" (Art. 21 Treaty on European Union - TEU) and of the "strict observance and development of international law" (Art. 3(5) TEU). More recently, this norm promotion focus has – in rhetoric – been paired with a stronger interest orientation and a desire to be considered a 'geopolitical' actor. For the time being, this does not amount to a *strategic* approach to the Global Spaces, however. And yet such a bespoke strategy that takes account of the uniqueness of both the Global Spaces *and* the European Union as a global actor is direly needed. The EU should thus adopt a Global Spaces strategy not only because of the growing significance of these Spaces, but also to clarify its own foreign policy ambitions vis-à-vis both internal and external audiences.

As major sites of power struggles, whose outcome will shape the future of human civilisation, Global Spaces require more attention than they have hitherto received. 'Controlling' – in the sense of collectively governing – the highly fragile physical spaces of the atmosphere, the poles, the high seas and outer space is crucial to preserve their biophysical integrity that has allowed humanity to thrive. A world of global warming exceeding 2°C above pre-industrial levels would pose unprecedented adaptation challenges. Continued trends of

ocean pollution or over-fishing, unregulated economic exploitation of the poles or of outer space (e.g. via space debris) would equally contribute to overstressing biophysical limits, with repercussions that hold a strong potential for destabilising global politics. On top of protecting its biophysical foundations, effective Global Spaces governance is also needed to preserve peaceful relations within and between societies. This implies, for instance, preventing cyberspace or outer space from becoming areas of increased weaponisation. All in all, avoiding such existential risk implies decisively protecting these Spaces – a need already recognised in international law across most existing governance arrangements, as discussed above.

The EU is aware of the importance of Global Spaces, as illustrated by its current flagship projects, the European Green Deal (EGD), which focuses on protecting the atmosphere and nature, with an impact on the high seas, the poles and outer space, and digitalisation relating to cyberspace. Yet, the (domestic) attention paid to these policy agendas has to date not translated into a full recognition of the need for a coherent Global Spaces strategy. So far, the EU has expanded on its traditional stance of promoting norms while paying lip service to protecting EU interests and strengthening 'strategic autonomy'. These measures seem, however, inappropriate to tackle the challenges posed by Global Spaces. Merely invoking norms, which are at the heart of the EU's integration project but may not be shared by others, seems as unsuited to the challenging contexts of Global Spaces as the belief that material capacity-building to mimic Great Power behaviour would make the EU an adequately strategic actor. This latter attempt to 'adapt' to geopolitical tendencies constitutes a fundamental misreading of the essence of the Union's identity as a global actor, depriving it of its fundamental assets. As a law-based political community relying on the shared interests and objectives of its members, the EU's identity is that of a multilateralist, whose strengths inevitably lie in the civilian, non-coercive realm. While it cannot afford to ignore geopolitical trends in Global Spaces, its strategic thinking should not let those dominate, but start from its own aims vis-à-vis these Spaces and its current capacities to attain them.

Both the significance of protecting the fragile Global Spaces and the inadequacy of the EU's current approach to them plead in favour of taking the strategic reflection on its contribution to Global Spaces governance to the next level.

The leitmotif of the EU's strategy: becoming a spacifier

A bespoke EU Global Spaces strategy implies "a method of creating strategic effects favourable to [EU] policy and interests by applying ends [objectives], ways [instruments] and means [capacities]" in these Spaces (Yarger 2006, 65). Like any strategic theatre, Global Spaces pose a two-fold general challenge pertaining to EU relations with (i) these Spaces *per se*, raising the question of *what* the EU wishes to achieve in them (*ends*); and (ii) the other players operating in those

Spaces, which calls for querying *how* the EU wants to achieve its ends by interacting with these players (*means, ways*).

When defining its *ends*, the EU must take due account of the specificity of the Global Spaces as areas requiring special protection. Through major policy initiatives, it has already – and at times very explicitly – bound itself to offering such protection. The European Green Deal is built around the aim of reaching the Paris Agreement’s net-zero emissions target domestically and globally to durably protect the atmosphere. It has among others influenced the EU’s 2021 Arctic policy, which argues that “the EU is committed to ensuring that oil, coal and gas stay in the ground, including in Arctic regions” (European Commission and High Representative 2021, 10). Concurrently, the EGD’s nature protection aim logically has implications for how the EU is to deal with Arctic and Antarctic territories (keeping the latter’s status as a ‘natural reserve’, in respect of the Antarctic Treaty) as well as with the high seas (fulfilling the BBNJ Agreement’s aim to create large marine protected areas). A similar logic extends to outer space, where the EU sees “the proliferation of space debris [as] the most serious risk to the sustainability of space activities”, which it has pledged to “address” (European Commission 2016, 9). Finally, cyberspace also needs careful attention to ensure an “open, free, global, stable and secure Internet” (Council of the EU 2023, 3). Across these Spaces, the EU’s ends thus converge on principled commitments to their protection, pursuant to its own values and interests and those of humanity more generally, as expressed in existing governance arrangements.

When reflecting on how to engage others strategically, the EU should initially ponder on the *means* it can bring to bear in these Spaces, from which its tools (*ways*) then derive. The EU’s capacities in global affairs stem in large part from its identity as a global actor that has traditionally thought of itself as a principled, norms-driven promoter of “multilateral cooperation and ... global governance” (Art. 21 TEU). Correspondingly, its capacities had been primarily ‘soft’ in nature, relying above all on diplomatic means. Its turn towards ‘principled pragmatism’ in the 2016 Global Strategy then marked a mind-shift towards a partially more interest-driven operation. This shift in self-understanding implied showing greater “sensitivity to contingency”, partnering selectively with others and playing “connector, coordinator and facilitator” roles (European Union 2016, 11, 27). It paved the way for drawing to a larger extent on harder, especially economic means. The aim of the Strategic Compass to also ramp up the EU’s coercive (military) means remains, to date, unfulfilled. At this stage, the EU is thus able to pragmatically draw on an array of diplomatic and somewhat harder economic capacities, which must therefore form the core foundation of its Global Spaces strategy.

Combining these two aspects, the *principled* ‘what’ of an EU Global Spaces strategy and the *pragmatic* ‘how’ of its practical roll-out, the Union’s self-understanding as a Global Spaces

actor can aptly be captured by the notion of ‘spacifier’, or ‘pacifier of Global Spaces’ – as an expression of principled pragmatism applied to the governance of those Spaces (Schunz 2023). With its *ends*, the EU shows a principled commitment to protecting Global Spaces, ‘leaving them in peace’. This implies maintaining them as far as possible in their original state by protecting the atmosphere, the high seas, outer space and the poles from environmental degradation (or restoring their *status quo ante*, e.g. in the case of the ozone layer). This protection requires the promotion of effective governance structures ensuring that relations around these Spaces, including cyberspace, remain peaceful. Simultaneously, the EU acknowledges the Space-specific geopolitical constellations and pragmatically deploys its diplomatic and economic *means* to work with multiple others to appease the relations around them.

Operationalising ‘principled pragmatism’, a ‘spacifier’ *leitmotif* grounds the EU’s Global Spaces strategy in a firm commitment to its key values – most prominently the pursuit of peace, precaution and the rule of law –, plays to its strengths as a multilateralist, and allows for greater flexibility of its diplomatic action to deal with increased geopoliticisation. Adopting this unique stance as a Global Spaces actor would allow the EU to fill a void in contemporary global politics, signalling to the world that it always stands for cooperative, durable solutions that leave those Spaces in peace, and that it is prepared to go very far in promoting, defending and implementing those solutions. An unequivocal positioning of this type would constitute a clear promise to its own and the global citizenry about what they can consistently expect from the EU as a Global Spaces actor.

If this self-understanding shapes the future EU Global Spaces strategy, the question remains which *ways* the EU can deploy to successfully implement it.

Ways to implement the strategy

Whereas a spacifier-oriented Global Spaces strategy is unambiguous about the EU’s main *ends* and can draw on its diplomatic and economic *means*, this section offers ideas on how these capacities can be deployed by concrete *ways* (tools) in the intricate constellations around Global Spaces.

A Global Space in which the EU has already been displaying features of a spacifier is the atmosphere. Particularly its most recent approach to global climate governance can therefore serve as an illustration of the ways to implement a Global Spaces strategy (see Schunz 2023):

- *Setting the example*: the EU has sought to lead by example via its domestic action. By adopting the EGD and the ‘European Climate Law’ that enshrines the net-zero emissions goal by 2050 into EU law and by initiating far-reaching steps towards attaining that goal, it signals to others that it is serious about the durable protection of

the atmosphere while proposing solutions others could follow towards this end.

- *Using collectively agreed targets (which have become EU ends) as benchmarks also for others:* since 2015, the EU has consistently, in virtually all its interactions with third parties (e.g. in its trade policies), employed the collectively agreed Paris Agreement target as a point of reference, underscoring the importance of this end.
- *Expanding its diplomatic outreach:* beyond its traditionally strong involvement in the multilateral negotiations of the UN climate regime, the EU has been engaging other major emitters bilaterally and via plurilateral fora (e.g. G-7) and initiatives (e.g. 2021 Global Methane Pledge), and increasingly reaching out to developing countries, but also private-sector and civil society actors to gather support and mobilise funding for the global green energy transition required to achieve the Paris Agreement targets. These efforts involve the collective quest for win-win solutions, addressing the EU's and its partners' interests and needs.
- *Adopting unilateral measures:* on top of these 'softer' diplomatic tools, the EU has adapted its approach to players whom it finds not to be compliant with the collectively agreed Paris Agreement target. In such cases, it has resorted to more assertively leveraging its 'market power', for instance through the adoption of a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, taxing products from energy-intensive industries stemming from countries whose efforts the EU deems insufficient, and via various due diligence measures aimed at decarbonising supply chains where this is necessary.

This example underscores how the EU has – in defence of a principled commitment to protecting the Global Space atmosphere – developed a strategy that takes the geopolitical constellations around this Space seriously. It has used the collectively agreed target as a benchmark and adapted the use of its external action tool-box by drawing on a broader set of diplomatic means to act as a 'connector, coordinator and facilitator' (European Union 2016: 27) to aid multiple others to co-evolve towards the Paris Agreement goals. Simultaneously, it relies, selectively and unilaterally, on its 'market power' to assertively signal the boundaries of what it considers as 'appropriate' behaviour in light of the Paris Agreement targets so as to underscore that protecting the atmosphere is non-negotiable.

Assuming that the EU is able to consolidate such an approach and find an internal consensus allowing it to steadily commit to similarly clear-cut ends in other Global Spaces (which presupposes defining such ends in cyberspace), it can draw on comparable means and ways to use those ends as benchmarks for itself and others. For instance, in relation to the poles, it could mobilise diplomatic tools in existing governance fora and deploy its market power as a lever to ensure that Antarctica remains a "natural reserve" and that the Arctic nature is protected, notably by promoting the moratorium

on fossil-fuel extraction foreseen in its 2021 Arctic policy. Whereas each Global Space may involve contingent geopolitical constellations, the overarching logic of the strategy remains constant: goal-oriented, assertive mediation – the EU works with a multiplicity of others (state and non-state actors) to guide global efforts towards permanent protection of the Space, but confronts those who do not comply with collectively agreed targets with their responsibilities.

The conclusion discusses the conditions for such an EU Global Spaces strategy to durably take hold.

Conclusion: effectively implementing a spacier-oriented EU Global Spaces strategy

This policy brief started from the observation that the EU's current approach to the major contemporary strategic theatres of the Global Spaces – atmosphere, high seas, Arctic and Antarctica, outer space, and cyberspace – does not yet amount to a coherent strategy. Whereas the EU promotes norms for an 'internationalisation' or 'functional territorialisation' of these Spaces, Great Powers like the US or China tend to act in more interest-driven ways.

To address this mismatch and render EU external action more effective while acknowledging the importance of these Spaces, the policy brief argues for the adoption of a bespoke EU Global Spaces strategy centred on a 'spacier' *leitmotif*. Combining a clear vision of the EU's ends in relation to the Global Spaces with attention to its own identity (and corresponding capacities) as a global actor *and* to the geopolitical context, such a strategy features a principled commitment to protecting the Spaces ('leaving them in peace') paired with pragmatic efforts at manoeuvring geopolitical struggles around them. These efforts use the aim to protect the Global Space as a benchmark and strategically deploy the EU's foreign policy tool-box to attain them.

Implementing such a strategy holds several advantages for the EU. For one, it preserves the EU's identity and plays to its strengths as an external actor. In so doing, it offers a 'third way' between the current, at times challenging defence of norms and the elusive quest for becoming a geopolitical Great Power. Successfully acting as a 'spacier' will allow the EU to develop a unique position in the governance of Global Spaces, filling a niche that Great Powers with their 'idiosyncratic' stances have left. It will make the EU a stable key partner for many stakeholders who, by themselves, encounter difficulties in reminding Great Powers of their responsibilities and international legal commitments to the durable protection of Global Spaces.

The preconditions for successfully implementing such a strategy are primarily domestic. First and foremost, there needs to be a political willingness to fully recognise the significance of the Global Spaces. This implies regarding them as interrelated, comparable policy challenges requiring the durable

definition of clear ends as the foundation for a cross-cutting strategic approach. It presupposes a commitment from the EU's member states and its institutions' foreign policy establishment. Second, it necessitates agreement on modifying the EU's self-understanding towards a hybrid between norm promoter and geopolitical actor, finally spelling out what 'principled pragmatism' can practically mean as a foreign policy approach. Third, the implementation of such a strategy on the ground requires various types of coherence – vertical (between EU institutions and member states), horizontal (between different policies) and practical (between words and

deeds). The latter presupposes an exemplary domestic policy implementation of the principled components of the EU's positions.

The hurdles for a successful roll-out of such a strategy are thus high, but the EU stands a lot to gain from taking them. Global Spaces can become the testing ground for developing a novel foreign policy approach that is neither rooted in the Union's traditional principled norms-drivenness nor in fruitless attempts at mimicking Great Powers.

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