/ TAKE AWAYS

"Europeans today are much less belligerent than in 1914 or 1939"

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June 2020

FRIEDRICH EBERT STIFTUNG

FES Regionalbüro für Zusammenarbeit und Frieden in Europa

FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe

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Based on public discussions of the survey "Security Radar 2019 – Wake-up call for Europe"
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1. Security Radar 2019 – what was it all about?

Goal of the public opinion survey

In the context of severe security challenges in Europe, new emerging cold and hot conflicts and intensifying cyber-attacks, the survey "Security Radar 2019" aimed to shed light on the public perception of European security. The goal was to provide information on a topic which should be seen as relevant not only for politicians but also for society as a whole.

The process of European unification in the 30 years after the fall of the Berlin wall proved fleeting, with new gaps emerging within Europe. The analysis of the perceptions and opinions of the population provides leaders with a basis for better-informed decision-making in a volatile security environment. The results of the survey are also a catalyst for an open and critical discussion with the public about the current security and foreign policy challenges in Europe.

Procedure

Seven countries were chosen for the representative public opinion poll, based on a sample of about 1,000 citizens in each country: France, Germany, Latvia and Poland (EU member states from different parts of Europe), Serbia (in EU accession negotiations), Ukraine (having an EU association agreement) and

Russia. The survey systematically investigates the attitudes and values related to the current security and foreign policy situation in Europe. The pollster Ipsos was assigned to conduct the poll via phone.

The survey measured values and attitudes in five dimensions: (1) perception of the current threat situation; (2) trust and attitudes towards institutions; (3) attitudes towards foreign and security policy; (4) attitudes towards national identity; (5) prospects for the development of security policy in Europe.

In addition to the public opinion poll, FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) conducted expert discussions in each participating country. The discussions helped reconstruct the respective national political discourse on European security and complemented the findings of the population survey.

2. Discussion and feedback in 2019

The survey was first presented at the Munich Security Conference and at a conference in Vienna with the participation of OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger. It was then complemented by debates in 20 cities: Belgrade, Berlin, Brussels, Bucharest, Budapest, Kharkov, Kyiv, Moscow, Odessa, Prague, Riga, Tartu, Tbilisi, Warsaw and Washington D. C. (2020) as well as in the Austrian cities of Alpbach, Bad Ischl, Klagenfurt and Salzburg.

Map: Roadshow Security Radar 2019

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a. Frequently Asked Questions

1. Does this poll-based study have an effect on political decision-making?

The study was foremost intended and executed to have a more solid basis for policy-advising by providing information for the discourse on European security politics. The objective of the Security Radar is to provide decision-makers with the perceptions and assessments of citizens in Europe.

The total population of the seven polled countries in the study is around 384 million people, which is more than half of the overall European population. The research on the impact of opinion polls on political decision-making indicates that polls can be a source of information used by politicians while elaborating or implementing public policies. They might as well be used for the purpose of agenda-setting. Recent research shows "that the public is able to develop and hold coherent views on foreign policy, that citizens can and do apply their attitudes to their electoral decisions, and that this leads politicians to consider the electoral implications of their overseas activities"[1].

2. How deep can one dig with available poll data?

With the data from over 7,000 respondents the survey tried not only to scratch the surface but to ask specific questions in order to find out more on crucial issues regarding European security and certain polled societies. The survey also had as objective to generate results covering the opinions of the polled from different perspectives, of which two seemed to be particularly interesting. Firstly, the survey took a closer look at Germany and Latvia to analyse the differences between citizens of East and West Germany, on the one hand, and between Latvian citizens and the Russian minority in Latvia, on the other. Surprisingly, it was possible to identify more similarities between Latvians and the Russian minority than one might assume. Especially when it comes to the question of cultural belonging and the perception of institutions like the EU, the results are similar.

Clear differences appeared when the respondents were asked about their perception of Russia and Russian foreign policy. Concerning potential differences between East and West Germany a similar effect can be observed: 70% of East Germans and 55.9% of West Germans are in favour of working more closely with Russia. Only 15.6% of West Germans agreed with the statement that Crimea was legally incorporated by Russia. In contrast, in Eastern Germany 27% agree with this statement.

Secondly, the survey reached out to the respondents with a specific research question. Here, the topic was defence spending, and the survey tried to find an answer to the question if perceived fears are the reason for the willingness to spend more on defence. Statistical analysis shows, and this may come as a surprise, – that a general sense of threat and insecurity does not necessarily motivate people in a country to support higher defence spending. More relevant for advocating higher military spending is the understanding that one's international status, identity and culture (in the broadest sense of the word) must be defended. The second is the assumption that the money is well invested, because it is assumed that investments in one's own military will bring benefits for one's society.

3. Which role does the media play in constructing the public opinion?

In 1996 German sociologist Niklas Luhmann wrote the famous words: "What we know about our society, indeed about the world in which we live, we know from mass media." With the help of the mass media, the information asymmetry regarding international events and processes, between the public and decision-makers, has gradually been reduced. The world is dealing with a very dynamic and mutually influential constellation of actors in which the role of agenda-setter is sometimes assumed by the public, sometimes by the media or politics. This creates an inevitable interdependence. Surveys whose results point in the same direction play an important role in the perception through media outlets. The survey of the Allensbach Polling Institute[2],

1   Baum, Potter: The relationships between mass media, public opinion, and foreign policy: toward a theoretical synthesis (Annual Review of Political Science 2008.11:39-65) p. 44

2   https://www.sicherheitsreport.net/wp-content/uploads/PM_Sicherheitsreport_2019.pdf

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published shortly before the Munich Security Conference 2019, showed the gradual distancing of the Germans from the USA, which was also evident in the Security Radar.

During the presentations of the Security Radar in different countries and with diverse audiences, many commentators were surprised by the deliberateness of the respondents in the countries surveyed, which seemed to be connected to a relatively high foreign policy awareness.

b. Main take-aways

1. Status dissatisfaction is a big obstacle

One of the biggest challenges to joint European security is widespread discontent with the countries' international standings. Remarkably, in countries east of Germany, status still seems a topic of political soul-searching. This may be a long-lasting effect of the Cold War. Their search for stability and belonging is still going on. As the example of "anxious" Latvia and Poland demonstrates, formal inclusion of those countries into institutions (e.g., EU or NATO) may be not enough. More than half of the population in these countries is not content with their country's international standing. A similar sentiment was revealed in the discussions in Bucharest. In France and Germany, however, overwhelming majorities are satisfied with the status of their country. Some audiences wondered where other Western-European countries like Italy or Spain would stand.

Status dissatisfaction was interpreted in some discussions as a lack of respect from others and was deemed even more important than material needs. Values seem to trump interests. This observation is echoed by Francis Fukuyama's recent work on politics of identity.

How to channel this dissatisfaction into the political process? So far, the "East" was hardly involved in the previous reform debate in the EU that revolved largely around the eurozone. Now it is time to identify and take the interests of the eastern European countries into account. Finding EU-wide and perhaps pan-European answers to the looming deep

recession in the wake of the corona crisis may be a chance.

Another implication of the findings on status provides a beam of hope for conflict resolution: more respect and eye-level politics may reduce tensions and prevent conflicts or contribute to their resolution. Indeed, the desire for debates on an equal footing was an important constant in almost all discussions, although this could be determined by specific wishes depending on the country. Germany and Austria want to see the EU on an equal footing with the USA and China, while in Serbia the status of the European Union as an economic power plays the greatest role and thus achieves the greatest attraction for a non-member of the community.

2. A more involved public is needed but does not guarantee change

Foreign policy seldom wins elections, yet the public opinion may be an important driver of change – like for instance at the end of the Cold War. Today, the peace movement is conspicuously absent. Even though the Security Radar reveals that people are concerned about foreign policy, these sentiments do not convert into political action, and Europe did not really "wake up". The hierarchy of threats seems to have changed in the past decades, so it is hard to mobilize society around foreign policy issues like back in the 1980s.

In order to carry out responsible foreign policy, leaders need to take the public opinion into consideration. One example of an inclusive, self-reflective approach was the Review of Foreign Policy in Germany, initiated in 2013 by the then foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. But who are suitable actors for translating the wishes of the public, like for instance a widespread desire for a more active foreign policy revealed in our survey, into politics? Political parties need to fill the gap, but they are less and less trusted. A pervasive lack of trust in most other state institutions may undermine politicians' accountability to the public.

Nevertheless, the discussions of the Security Radar revealed that foreign policy should play a greater role in public discourse. There is a widespread wish

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for a cooperative foreign policy based on compromises, a sense of responsibility and respect of international organisations. However, the backside of involving the public could be an emotion-driven approach to foreign policy (Brexit can be considered as one such example). Moreover, many foreign policy decisions are complex and involve a larger degree of awareness than the average citizen has.

3. Less belligerent societies today than in the 20th century

One of the panellists drew the conclusion that societies, at least those polled in the survey, are less belligerent than societies in the first half of the 20th century. The argument was based on the results concerning questions about multilateral organisations and about a preference for diplomatic solutions. Military interventions are not perceived as a suitable answer to conflicts by any of the European states polled. This understanding is based on the positive concept of compromise.

This thesis is supported by a Peace Perception Poll (https://www.international-alert.org/peacepoll/) conducted by International Alert, the British Council and RIWI, a Canadian based institute, specializing in conducting surveys. One of the findings was: "Overall, the results underscore the need for tailored, informed, long-term solutions to conflict. They highlight a level of innate understanding from members of the public about how to tackle conflict that we may not otherwise appreciate if we did not ask. With space for nuance in political discourse diminishing, this poll shows that nevertheless, this is what people demand when it comes to the challenge of conflict. While the poll illustrates the diversity of people's experiences, it also shows how much people have in common when it comes to how we aspire to, create and sustain more peaceful and secure societies."[3]

3. Outlook: Inclusive European security requires a political process

Drawing on the survey and expert discussions, Security Radar 2019 laid out first steps for a process to build a lasting European security order. To identify potential leaders in such process, the study clustered countries into four categories based on public responses to the question on status satisfaction and the question on preparedness to take more international responsibility. France and Germany emerged as "responsible to lead" the process, while all other countries bar Russia (that fell into the cluster "frustrated") were categorized as "anxious" yet possibly ready to join France and Germany.

Why is a process towards common European security needed in the first place? After all, necessary institutions (e.g., OSCE, UN) and rules through international law are already in place; the old challenge is that not all players play by the agreed rules. Herein lies the crux: the problem is indeed not institutional, but political. No regulatory mechanism exists that would bring big powers such as the US or Russia into compliance with the rules. Only an inclusive political process can ensure that big powers support rather than undermine a security order.

The survey responses give reasons for optimism: After all, most Russians consider themselves Europeans. A European security order should be built with Russia, not against it. In most countries, a majority wants friendly relations with Russia. Cooperation, interdependence and compromise, endorsed by the respondents of the survey, can be a foundation of a political process towards a common security order. It should be called "European" because security in Europe does not depend only on the EU. But the EU is well-placed to take the lead and initiate the process.

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3 https://www.international-alert.org/sites/default/files/Organisation_PeacePerceptionsPoll_Ed2_EN_2018.pdf

FES ROCPE in Vienna

The goal of the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Vienna is to come to terms with the challenges to peace and security in Europe since the collapse of the Soviet Union a quarter of a century ago. These issues should be discussed primarily with the countries of Eastern Europe – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – and with Russia, as well as with the countries of the EU and with the US. The security order of Europe, based until recently on the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the Paris Charter (1990), is under threat. This is, among others, a result of different perceptions of the development of international relations and threats over the last 25 years, resulting in divergent interests among the various states.

For these reasons, FES ROCPE supports the revival of a peace and security dialogue and the development of new concepts in the spirit of a solution-oriented policy. The aim is to bring scholars and politicians from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US together to develop a common approach to tackle these challenges, to reduce tensions and to aim towards conflict resolution. It is our belief that organisations such as the FES have the responsibility to come up with new ideas and to integrate them into the political process in Europe.

We support the following activities:

- Regional and international meetings for developing new concepts on cooperation and peace in Europe;
- A regional network of young professionals in the field of cooperation and peace in Europe;
- Cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and the human.

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